

THE CHURCH AND RURAL RENEWAL: A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF
RECENT THEOLOGY AND MINISTRIES PROMOTING
RURAL SUSTAINABILITY

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the Faculty of the
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Ministry

by
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Abstract

The Church and Rural Renewal: A Historical Survey of Recent Theology and Ministries Promoting Rural Sustainability

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Christian social action has not been characterized by an abundance of historical reflection in its search for a normative vision upon which to base its efforts in building a healthy, thriving rural culture. This project attempts to rectify some of that lack by surveying the larger historical-ecological context in which rural degradation happens, and case studies of four preceding church programs or agencies which recognized the existence of a "rural problem" and sought ways to correct it. Four specific ministries--the Country Life Movement, Arthur Holt and the Merom Institute, the Catholic Worker farms, and the Town and Country Movement--are studied in depth. Their perception of the problem, theological assumptions and strategies are highlighted and contrasted in their historical context.

Such historical awareness points to the inadequacy of previous theological understanding of the physical world and the need for a metaphysics which incorporates rural life. This deficiency can be partially corrected by recent developments in the themes of responsible stewardship, romantic idealism, and deep ecology. It will be shown, however, that there is a

need to incorporate the rational metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead into these speculations. Process metaphysics can integrate many of these formulations and provide a more rational and coherent philosophical theology for current ministries of rural renewal. Rural churches and culture can become more sustainable by applying the insights of process cosmology in the understanding of their own identity and the forces which are degrading their lives. Finally, it is recognized that the food system which influenced the development of rural culture and civilization must be altered to effect rural renewal.

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I would like to thank the Board of Directors of The Campbell Farm for providing me with a sabbatical year to make this study. I am deeply grateful to them for this opportunity as well as to the many volunteers who have maintained the Farm during our absence. It is my hope that much of this project will be useful to them and other Christian rural ministries in formulating new goals and maintaining the vision of bringing physical and spiritual renewal to America's farms, rural peoples, and churches.

I would also like to thank my parents for much of the financial support for this project. They have been an inspiring example of loyalty, common sense and love of the land.

Through the teaching of Professor Vincent H. Learnihan of Pomona College I gained an enduring awareness of the significance of history. Drs. John Cobb, David Griffin, and C. Dean Freudenberger helped me to understand the relationship between theology and ethics. Dr. Freudenberger has spent many hours struggling to hone my thinking and writing skills. Drs. Ann Taves and Dan Rhodes proposed and critiqued the case study approach to combine history and theology.

Finally, I would like to thank Barbara Smith Gilbert for her patient example of nurturing love for me and our children.

She first introduced me to Wendell Berry, which started a seven year search for renewal and resettling of rural America, culminating in this project.

PREFACE

There are many motivations from my past which have inspired the development of this project. I believe it is important to understand several of the more obvious ones especially those concerning agricultural background, faith development and intellectual study.

My feelings about farming as a child and adolescent were ambivalent. On the one hand, I sensed the profound dependence on the land and weather that growing up on a farm can produce. I also remember the security of listening to my father talk about his grandfather planting the apple trees that we were harvesting; and the trust for life as we tended and cared for trees that would not bear fruit for 15 - 20 years hence. On the other hand, I had first-hand experience with the boredom, sweat and difficulty involved in growing crops. One of my most prevalent thoughts while engaged in tedious labor was: "There has to be a better way; I'm going to invent a mechanical digger, a picking machine, an electric thinner...." There were also feelings of loneliness as most of my friends were not doing the same type of labor.

Occasionally, as I grew older, a friend would join me. It was at such times that I remember a great satisfaction of being able to work and talk at the same time. There was a

joining together of the security of sustaining oneself while enjoying mental stimulation, all within an environment which encouraged spiritual attachment to Nature.

Christian faith took on a more personal and committed aspect in my young adult life. I began to realize that I needed to be ready to live out the "good news" of God's love in particular social situations and not exclusively in my head or heart. That many of Christ's commands and summons were to be incarnated in my own personal life became increasingly clear to me. The focus of my theology, though, was centered on individual sin and salvation by grace.

The next stage of my faith development was to grow out of the individualism described above, and into a more corporate faith. As with many of the Viet Nam-era generation, the vision of integration and wholeness was very appealing to me. After college and seminary, the opportunity arose to combine faith, work and learning. This opportunity consisted of a 40 acre fruit and alfalfa farm being given to the Presbytery of Central Washington. My wife, Barbara, and I made a proposal to this group of churches that this farm be used as a work-learning center for Christian college students. It would be a place where they could learn to integrate their faith, physical labor, and minds. This plan was accepted and the ministry of The Campbell Farm was begun in 1980.

As this ministry developed it became clear that other issues than personal sin and wholeness were demanding attention by the Christian community. The very fabric of agricul-

ture locally and globally appeared to be tearing from the pressures of hunger, erosion, loss of fertility, urban development and financial woes. The structures of rural culture--the community and church life, small businesses, family farms, and healthy environment--appeared to be crumbling.

As a result, The Campbell Farm has increasingly taken on the role within the church of examining, understanding and stimulating the search for renewing options to reverse this degradation process within rural culture. Currently, it seeks to do this through education and networking. As an education center it serves to bring before the church some of the issues and problems related to rural culture. It performs this task through conferences, retreats, college courses and continuing education programs.

In its networking role it serves as a bridge between rural and urban, clergy and laity, academia and worker. As such it is specially suited to be a present-day reference point from which to examine and improve the effectiveness of rural renewal programs.

That the Farm is owned and operated by the Presbytery of Central Washington, a judicatory of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has provided another context in which this kind of ministry can take place. It is out of such a context that I feel particularly called to address the issue of the role of the church in rural renewal. History and theology have always played a major role in helping to keep the Reformed tradition "semper reformada"--that is, continually reanalyzing both the

Bible and Christian theology in the light of new thought and experience. For this tradition, the Church was never meant to withdraw from society, nor acquiesce to it, but actively seek to do God's will within it. There is no greater need for it to do so than presently in rural culture.

A final environmental factor which has influenced this project is the diverse ethnic and economic communities in the Yakima Valley. The Farm is located on the Yakima Indian Reservation and as such has enjoyed contact with Native Americans and their hunting-gathering culture. Large immigrant communities of Filipinos, Japanese, Mexicans, as well as many Europeans, farm in the Yakima Valley. These farms represent a variety of systems including subsistence, family farm, large corporation, and tenant. Also, there is a rich religious community which each one of these groups has spawned. Finally, its location nearby the city of Yakima provides an exposure to urban-rural relations.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A frequent criticism of Christian social action has been its tendency to be short-sighted. Such is the case in regards to Christian social involvement in the sphere of rural society. The lack of historical awareness of previous church-sponsored efforts to correct degenerating rural environments, culture and food systems hinders present programs from ministering effectively or sustainably.

It is often easier to generate emotions, money and volunteer efforts to respond to a crisis which seems suddenly to appear upon the scene, than to recognize the longevity, development and breadth of social problems. This type of "crisis-mongering" results in flurries of charitable activity but, often, unsustainable results.¹ Also, such endeavors can be tunnel-visioned in their emphasis upon a single issue; as if the solution to this or that problem will cure all of society's ills. Often, then, reactionary swings will occur as

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Ivan Illich coined the term "crisis-mongering" to describe the change of meaning the word "crisis" had undergone in modern industrial society: "'Crisis' has come to mean that moment when doctors, diplomats, bankers, and assorted social engineers take over and liberties are suspended. Like patients, nations go on the critical list. 'Crisis,' the Greek term that has designated 'choice' or 'turning point' in all modern languages, now means 'driver, step on the gas.' Crisis now evokes an ominous but tractable threat against which money, manpower, and management can be rallied." Ivan Illich, Toward a History of Needs (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 4.

people resent having other concerns not given proper attention. Too, such social action suffers from the proclamation of well-meaning values without the proper grounding in how these values might be implemented given the complex social² matrix of modern life.

The recent spate of books, programs, prophecies, advocates and conferences exposing and analysing American rural problems often bears the characteristics of this "crisis-mongering." The solutions being proposed to save the family farm, create rural renewal, prevent environmental degradation, cure hunger and poverty, and restore country life often lack awareness of the roots of this crisis, or previous efforts to solve the same problems. As a result, such solutions are often written off as agrarian pipedreams or utopian nostalgia. Or, much energy and many finances are expended repeating the same mistakes made by preceding church efforts.

Also, the effectiveness of such well-meaning efforts can be blunted by the larger socio-political forces at work in the society. Such forces are often hidden and entrenched

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R.H. Tawney is critical of the lack of sophistication of so many reform movements: "Granted that I should love my neighbor as myself, the questions which, under modern conditions of large-scale organizations remain for solution are, Who precisely is my neighbor? and, How exactly am I to make my love for him or her effective in practice?...Traditional social doctrines had no specific to offer, and were merely repeated, when in order to be effective, they should have been thought out again from the beginning and formulated in new and living terms." John W. Houck and Oliver F. Williams, eds., Co-Creation and Capitalism (Washington, D.C.: Univ. Press of America, 1983), 1.

in values, ideas and systems. These myths and world-views can slowly grind down the sharp purpose of such ministries and sap their energy and vision. Some of the forces at work preventing rural renewal are attitudes about the Creation, the dynamics of the rural-urban interchange, the role of agriculture in civilized societies and its connections to religion, and the political powers intertwined with technology, capital and work ethics.

The recent concern about the "rural problem" has many precedents. In this century alone an estimated 6 million American farms have gone bankrupt or been abandoned.³ Approximately 40 million rural people have become urban refugees in one of the greatest social upheavals known to human history. Also, American farmers have eroded into the atmosphere and water about one-half of the fertile topsoil, with the most dramatic results being experienced in the Dust Bowl of the thirties.⁴ Throughout this social and economic turmoil the church has not been silent. There have been many church-sponsored education centers and programs created to respond to the degeneration of both the rural land and community. It behooves anyone seeking to address the issues today to know the history of these projects. It is important to understand the theology and solutions they offered, what was successful

3

Shantilal P. Bhagat, The Family Farm: Can It Be Saved? (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren, 1985), 23-32.

4

C. Dean Freudenberger, Food For Tomorrow? (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 15.

and what was not. It is also crucial to understand the contexts of those ministries and how the situation today is both similar to and different from them.

A normative vision of a sustainable rural culture must include historical reflection upon preceding efforts to deal theologically, ethically and practically with the on-going phenomenon of rural degradation.

Definition of Major Terms

Sustainability

This is the ability of an organism to sustain itself within its ecosystem. As the term is being used in this project it also means "regenerative capacity"--that is, fecundity. This is the ability not only to continue living for the duration of its own life-span but also to reproduce itself, even, perhaps adding an element of novelty or increased complexity in the reproduction. Sustainability does not mean the state of being static or unchanging. Nor does it mean continuous growth or progress. Rather it recognizes that all forms of organic life grow and die. Yet, each life and death enriches the complexity of life and enhances the possibilities for more life in the future. Thus, a synonym for sustainability in this context will be "renewal."

Degradation

As it is being used here, this word represents the exact opposite of sustainability. It means not just senescence but dying without the possibility of renewal or reproduction. It means increasing sterility, mounting paralysis. Throughout

this project it is usually applied to societies of organisms--specifically the people, animals and plants inhabiting rural culture--rather than individuals.

Agri/Rural Culture

This term refers to the creatures, plants and organisms that dwell in the forests, fields and small towns. Agri/rural culture is the first stage of all civilizations. It differs from hunting-gathering cultures in that it is settled, exploits other physical resources through foresight and planning, and relies on present sacrifice for future rewards. This agri/rural culture is not just a prerequisite for civilizations. Such culture is retained even as the civilization becomes highly urbanized. Inherent in this description is the presumption that the settled rural community is intertwined with the form, technology and performance of the agriculture which it engages in. In other words, the agricultural system--i.e. patch, subsistence, surplus, cash, family, communal, cooperative, corporate--determines much of the rest of a culture, religion, social relations and, ultimately, sustainability of a civilization.

Church

This term is used in its broadest sense to denote any organized community of Christians whose mission it is to assist the enactment of the reign of God. The principal resources of this community for deciphering its mission are tradition and history, the Bible, personal and corporate revelation through the Spirit, and the consensus of rational minds.

Education

The following definition depicts the way this paper understands education: it is the "translating of information, understanding or wisdom into behavioral traits."⁵ Such translation can happen through ritual, schools, elders, conferences, sermons, etc.

Scope and Limitations

One limit of this study is that it only includes American examples. Such a limit is both necessary for the scope of such a project and because American agriculture is distinctly different than most others. One example of this difference is that the stages of deterioration of the rural sector in America are related to the peculiar abundance of excellent, fertile soil. In addition, the reaction to this loss is related to the unique form of American civil religion. Therefore, it is important to examine the American context separately. However, many of the case studies have parallels in other countries.

A second limitation is that the case studies are all located in the twentieth century. Again, this is partially due to the need to focus such a project. Also, though, it has only been in the last 80 years that churches, judicatories and seminaries have formulated organized educational efforts to understand rural problems and propose appropriate responses. Before that time romantic nostalgia was the dominant response

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Illich, 80.

of rural observers who longed for lost values of what was perceived as a "simpler" life. Some groups organized utopian communities based on agrarian values but no attempt was made to integrate them into the larger urban civilization, nor to help solve the pragmatic problems faced by their neighboring farmers.⁶ It was not until the convergence of the social gospel, the "closing" of the American frontier and the rapid technological change affecting agriculture at the turn of this century that more systematic responses were formulated by the Christian churches.

The four case studies examined in this project, as a result, all occur in this century. Although they exhibit some of the agrarian populism of earlier "back to the land" movements, they also include programmatic and institutional responses for the larger church. Also included are new formulations of theology and ethics, and tactics to implement changes in the society as a whole. They do not attempt to be "models" or "remnants," but programs to treat what they perceive to be barriers to rural health.

A further limitation is its focus on church institutions. It could well be argued that the secular forces have played a more important role in rural regeneration. However, such a study on the church's role is necessitated both by its relation to The Campbell Farm and also because much of the prob-

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Brooke Farm, the Oneida Community and Hopewell all were started in rural environments. Arthur A. Ekirch, in his book Man and Nature in America (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963) traces agrarian sentiments to Penn, Paine, Franklin, and Jefferson and, thus, to America's foundation.

lem has spiritual and theological roots. Also, the church is the one institution which has respectability and viability in the rural community and yet can network with the urban community. The latter has so much power to decide the former's destiny that it is imperative that an institutional response be acceptable to both the urban and rural sectors. Still, whenever possible, it will be noted how the various attempts have or could better network with secular counterparts.

Finally, this project will deal only with educational responses. It will touch upon other forces--economics, politics--only insofar as they are addressed by these educational institutions. Truly, the educational factor of social change has come under justified attack for "raising consciousness but lowering actions." All too many ministers and Christian educators settle for "consciousness-raising" conferences then throw up their hands in frustration when little practical action is accomplished. What they do not often realize is that existing social institutions can create almost insurmountable barriers to creative and enduring change. Therefore, their education programs must have some element of pragmatic vision if they seek to avoid powerlessness, futility and frustration.

Each one of these case studies embodies some of this practical vision. While often originating within bureaucratic programs, they are conscious efforts to actualize their vision for a renewed rural environment. They demonstrate that, especially in the church, education can still occupy a central role not only in the handing on of traditions but also pro-

viding prophetic insight. It is the method best suited to awakening the average person to a problem and providing a forum for the cross-fertilization of solutions.

Work Previously Done in the Field

This field of historical study is relatively unexplored. The role of theology and church education in rural life has not commanded attention from historians. Several major studies have been conducted concerning comparative utopian rural communities, the effects of the vast wilderness upon the development of American morals and religion, and the relation between religion and agrarian populism.⁷ Yet, little has been done to examine the forces at work causing deterioration of the rural culture; and even less to understand the churches' role as cause and corrective. There are no battles or wars to call attention to the causes or effects of the demise of the rural eco-system. Like the soil which is carried away by the winds and rains, rural degradation has happened more like erosion than explosion. It is only after the rocks are exposed and the gullies too deep to drive over that attention is given. A hidden assumption appears to be at work here in this field of academic inquiry: that ethics and values play no part in the structure and operation of agriculture. Education,

7

See Ekirch; Peter J. Schmitt, Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969); Catherine Albanese, Corresponding Motion: Transcendental Religion and the New America (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1977); Wayne C. Rohrer and Louis Douglas, The Agrarian Transition in America: Dualism and Change (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

faith and agriculture are presumed to be mutually exclusive.

Thus, when certain crises impact the rural sector with consequent economic collapse, environmental exhaustion, famine or social migration it was presumed that these were temporary and needed "quick fixes." The importance of this project, however limited in focus, is illuminated considering this rather woeful neglect of historical development.

Several works, at least, have taken beginning steps to explore this field. The first study which took seriously both the magnitude of the problem and its interrelationship to both intellectual and spiritual factors was the monumental collection of sources by Pitirim Sorokin, A Sourcebook in Rural Sociology,⁸ written in 1930. He was the first scholar to note the long-term process of rural degeneration throughout civilized history and make a scientific study of its impact on rural churches and communities. One of his Chinese sources--written by the Emperor Wen-Ti c.165 B.C.--bears striking resemblance to modern farm discussions:

[farmers] have to suffer flood or drought, bad government and the collection of taxes at inconvenient times, with orders issued in the morning and changed in the evening. When the farmers have a harvest they have to sell it at half-price. When they do not have a harvest they have to borrow crops at double interest. Therefore some of them are forced to sell their houses and farms, their sons and grandsons to pay their debts. On the other hand the big merchants accumulate the crops and double the interest.⁹

8

Pitirim A. Sorokin, Carle C. Zimmerman and Charles J. Galpin, eds., A Systematic Sourcebook in Rural Sociology (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1930).

9

Sorokin, et al., 20.

Sorokin also documents the efforts of the First Testament prophets as they lobbied against human claims to land ownership and collectivization, and for giving the land a rest. They spoke out against the greed of a King Ahab devouring up the resources of those less powerful than himself, and against the urban arrogance of a King Nebuchadnezzar asserting,

That which nothing before had done, I did...A wall like a mountain that cannot be moved, I builded... great canals I dug and lined them with burnt brick laid in bitumen and brought abundantly water to all the people...I paved the streets of Babylon with stone from the mountains...magnificent palaces and temples I have built...Huge cedars from Mount Lebanon I cut down...with radiant gold I overlaid them and with jewels I adorned them.¹⁰

Even the very essence of "urbanity" himself, Voltaire, according to Sorokin, had the sense to see that something was amiss in the country,

...religion itself was founded on agriculture. All the fêtes and all the rites have been but the emblems of this art--the primary of all arts--which united men together, supplied them with food, dwelling and clothes, which represent the three things satisfying human nature... everything so sacred, so respected, in rural life now is despised in our large cities...through what fatality did it happen that agriculture is honored only in China! ¹¹

Yet it was not Sorokin's concern to trace attempts to arrest this decline. His collection records the observations of the social evolution from agrarian to urban civilizations throughout many different cultures.

¹⁰

Wes Jackson, New Roots for Agriculture (San Francisco: Friends of the Earth, 1980), 39.

¹¹

Sorokin, et al, 133.

It was not until 1957 that a book was published which analyzed the broader historical involvement of the church in the rural American context. This was the date that Mark Rich¹² wrote The Rural Church Movement. In it he traces efforts made by the church in the twentieth century to revitalize dying rural churches and communities. Though intimately involved in some of the programs himself, Rich's study is cursory and devoid of cognition of the larger social forces at work in the rural sector. It is also surprising--considering the ecological damage of the Dust Bowl era--that little was mentioned of the church's role in causing or rectifying the environmental degradation. This book was followed by William L. Bowers' study of The Country Life Movement.¹³ Though Bowers only examines the first two decades of the twentieth century, he does an excellent task of analyzing the coordinated efforts between church and secular institutions.

The Lilly Foundation funded a study in 1984 by Marvin Judy¹⁴ titled From Ivy Tower to Village Spire. This traced the history of theological training for rural pastors. It is also helpful for learning about current curriculums and teachers in seminaries dealing with rural issues. However, it is apparent that Judy shares little awareness of the immense tragedies

¹² Mark Rich, The Rural Church Movement (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1957).

¹³ William L. Bowers, The Country Life Movement in America (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1974).

¹⁴ Marvin Judy, From Ivy Tower to Village Spire (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ., 1984).

which have affected the rural culture. The study shows no evidence of the historical role which the twentieth century American church has played in defining the problem of rural degradation and the search for a theological and practical response to it.

Methodology

A case study approach shall be used to examine some of the more important trends in the churches' response to rural degradation. The four which have been selected as representative are: The Country Life Movement and the Presbyterian Church, Arthur Holt and the Merom Institute of Chicago Theological Seminary, the Catholic Worker Farms, and the Town and Country Church Movement. This paper will rely upon secondary sources, as well as numerous historical works for providing the history and dimensions of the rural crisis. In each case a specific project or ministry of a denomination has been selected as a practical expression of its mission focus.

In the analysis of the 20th-century, rural American context in which these ministries are placed, several questions can help to focus on the larger issues at stake:

1. Why is rural degradation considered a problem?
2. Why should the church and theologians be concerned about such a social issue?
3. Why is analysis of the larger socio-ecological context an important consideration as background for these ministries?

The questions which shall be addressed to each project are the following:

1. What theological tradition or insight did it base its

ministry upon?

2. How did it define the "rural problem?"

3. What causes were identified as relevant to this crisis?

4. What were the solutions and strategies proposed or effected?

Each one of these ministries published periodical newsletters or collections of papers which are available through library research. Also, some of the principal figures designing these ministries have written separate volumes and pamphlets. All of these materials will be utilized for analysis of their goals and theologies. Since they all were sponsored by existing institutions or denominations there are evaluation materials available through them.

Following the presentation of each project it will be necessary to address questions seeking integration among them.

1. How have their theological foundations contrasted or been similar?

2. How have their perceptions of the problem compared with each other?

3. How are their strategies similar and different?

4. How did their theology affect their analysis of the problem and proposed solutions?

Finally, through analysis of the present rural context and theological development, it is important to ask,

1. What, if any, changes or additions in theology and strategies can be surmised from this historical analysis to improve effectiveness for present ministries? What was effec-

tive? What was inadequate? What do recent theologians and Biblical scholars have to offer in the search for a normative vision for a sustainable agri/rural culture?

2. How might current ministries such as The Campbell Farm learn from historical precedents?

The answers to these questions will be sought through personal analysis and theological reflection.

Chapter Outline

The second chapter outlines the roots of rural degeneration which have brought the need for rural renewal in this century. Some reference will be made to the global and pre-twentieth century accounts of this same process. The contexts of soil, civilization, church, ethics, rural-urban interchange, and the nineteenth century will be described as a backdrop for the twentieth century case studies.

The next chapter contains the four case studies which have been selected as concrete examples of problem awareness, value foundations and search for a normative vision as regards the degeneration of the rural sector in this century. They have been selected to exemplify education from various levels: the national church bodies, the seminaries, urban social justice organizations, ecumenical federations and coalitions of rural parishes. After a short history and placement in its own context, each project will be analysed on the basis of its motivation, goals, means and strategies.

Chapter 4 compares and contrasts the theological and ethical foundations of these church programs. Their contexts, perceptions of the problems, and their strategies will be

compared. It concludes with the awareness that one of the greatest needs for church-sponsored rural renewal programs is to articulate a more coherent theological metaphysic.

Chapter 5 explores the new interest taken by theological and philosophical schools to address the present rural crisis and the need for an ecological ethic. New insights from process theology will be presented and analyzed for their possible applications in present endeavors.

The last chapter offers a summary of what may be learned from this study. Specific recommendations will be proposed as regards the future goals, vision and purpose of The Campbell Farm. It is hoped that some of these may also be of use to other church agencies working in the same arena. General guidelines for the church as to its appropriate role in the rural sector in the future will be suggested.

CHAPTER 2

The Contexts of Rural Degradation

The problem of rural degradation has an extensive historical, ecological and cultural background. Unlike the events leading up to a war or some other conflagration, no obvious cause can be isolated, nor effect be immediately known. Therefore, it is important to begin an understanding of rural degradation in a broad context before focusing in on the problem as it has been manifest in twentieth-century America.

Soil Development

Humans like all plant and animal life need food, air and water to survive. These three necessities of life are dependent upon the soil. The soil is that fine "skin"--averaging 1 to 2 feet--over the surface of the Earth made up of mineral and organic particles. It is out of this matrix that plants are grown--which plants both feed animal life and sustain the atmosphere--and that the water is held in place.

This soil matrix did not exist for the first three and a half billion years of our planet's life. It only started to be formed around 350,000,000 B.C.E during the Silurian Period. It was about this time that geologists believe the first plants started to grow. These earliest botanical specimens were extremely hardy and able to survive in cracks and crevices, rather than in rich topsoil. Their survival made it possible

for less tenacious varieties of plants to develop because the life cycle of the former provided organic material, helped to pulverize the rock, and anchored in the resulting "soil."

When hominids appeared about 1,000,000 B.C.E. the soil volume had reached a fairly constant figure. Since that time the soil has been rearranged by glacial, wind and water action, and enriched by continued growth and decay but its total volume has remained about the same: enough to sustain a rich and diverse vegetative and animal life, but "thin." As ethicist C. Dean Freudenberger notes,

...there is very little soil upon the land of planet earth. The continents themselves represent only .4% of the planet's mass. Of the earth's surface, 75% is covered with water...the remaining 25% is dry land....Of this 25%, one-fifth is too cold to produce food and fiber; one-fifth is too high and one-fifth too rugged to be inhabited, leaving only two-fifths useful for human life. But of this two-fifths, there are many areas of poor soil quality, excessive rainfall and marginal grazing resources. ¹

Soil continues to be produced at the rate of approximately one inch per 100 years in optimum conditions, which is enough to balance out the natural attrition from wind and water erosion. When Will Rogers stated, "Buy land, God isn't making it anymore," he would have perhaps been more accurate to say, "Buy soil....God is making it, but not at a fast enough rate to counter the despoilation wrought by the humans."

In the intervening million years before the first urban civilizations began to take form (c.5,000 B.C.E.), the devel-

¹
C. Dean Freudenberger, The Gift of Land (Los Angeles: Franciscan, 1981), 20-21.

oping humans practiced a hunting-gathering type of existence. Though many species of plant and animal life became extinct during this epoch--sometimes due to human excesses--all the evidence shows that the soil gradually increased in its fertility. Though the hunter-gatherers may have had something to do with over-hunting certain animals, they did little damage to the soil matrix. From the standpoint of air, water, and soil, almost everything done by the humans-as-hunters-gatherers supported, sustained and sometimes improved the health of the eco-system.

7,000 Years of Civilization

See how cruel the whites look. Their lips are thin, their noses sharp, their faces furrowed and distorted by folds. Their eyes have a staring expression; they are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something; they are always uneasy and restless. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think they are mad.²

A Pueblo Indian

The close connection between agriculture and civilization³ has been well documented. Viewed in the context of the 350 million-year development of the soil matrix and the one million-year evolution of hominids, both agriculture and civilization appeared "instantaneously."

Correspondingly, urbanization and degradation of the rural

² Frederick Turner, Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1983), 65.

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See note 6 below.

environment and culture has been a feature of almost all civilizations. The land, forests, and topsoil are mined by dominant cities to maintain the creative advance of mental and material activity. When these contiguous regions are exhausted the more aggressive civilizations will reach out to incorporate far flung colonies to sustain their growth. Ultimately these empires, too, have collapsed under the weight of bureaucracy and greed, leaving only skeletons of once lush and fecund ecosystems. Again, in the context of the millions of years it took to build these eco-systems, such destruction appears to be instantaneous, almost comparable to the dropping of bombs on Pearl Harbor.

The role of agriculture in this degradation process is integral. As mentioned above, the change from hunter/gatherer food systems to "extractive" agriculture was, in large part, responsible for the flourishing of hundreds of civilizations in the past 7,000 years. However, two innovations accompanied this flourishing transition: the disruption of topsoil by ploughs and irrigation to increase productivity, and the cutting of woodlands for fuel, farmland, and housing of increased populations.

The plough enabled a ten-fold increase in the food supply by eliminating competition for the less vigorous but more fruitful grain varieties. Irrigation ensured a yearly crop and also increased abundance of crops. Agriculture required a stable population so more permanent homes were built, often with wood frames. Agricultural crops required more laborers so

population increased. Thirdly, agricultural foods often required more cooking so fuels became a necessity. The resulting increase of calories and stability allowed for individuals within these societies to pursue the crafts, trading, arts, religion and politics which are characteristic of civilization.

Some of the unforeseen effects of these innovations were the demise of the rural eco-system and the enslavement of much of its population. The plough was chiefly responsible for "unzipping" the protective covering of sod, thus exposing the topsoil to wind and rain erosion. The irrigation canals, urban public works, and large farms required the monotonous, low-paid labor of much of the rural peoples. Specialization of crops made the farmers dependent upon traders and consumers for their own well-being. Woodlands have been quickly destroyed without consideration for regeneration. The rapid change to monocrops and new hybrids has made the food base highly susceptible to disease and pests so famine becomes widescale in rural communities.

Agricultural Values, Religion and Philosophy

These drastic changes were accompanied by ideological changes. There was a need for "justification." That is, in order to use a plough--"ripping a knife through your mother's chest" as some Native Americans called it--there had to be a desacralizing of the earth. God had to be taken out of the creation and put away in temples and the sky so as not to be harmed by human technology.

The agricultural landscape became one of the first scientific laboratories. Both animal breeding and field cropping are reductionist. They reduce the environment to a controlled situation with as few variables as possible. Then, problems are isolated, observed and solved. Another description of this simplifying process is what philosopher John Locke called the "tabula rasa" approach to creation. Though he was referring to education and human understanding, the same term can be applied to an agriculturalist's perception of the creation. With the help of the plough, the land becomes a blank slate able to be written upon by human rationality. Fields should be made clean so that production could be increased.

A new attitude toward creation had to be adopted in order to promote this cleaning up process. Nature begins to be perceived as wild, threatening, discombobulated. Before it can be tamed by human reason an act of violence must be committed in order to break it, bring it to its knees. A recent writer, Susan Griffin, reflects on this phenomenon.

He breaks the wilderness...clears the land of trees, brush, weed. The land is brought under his control... into her soil he places his plow. He labors, he plants...he makes her yield. Whatever she brings forth he calls his own...yet she is fickle. She dries up, refuses to yield. He is determined he will master her, make her produce at will...says that the ways of the land can be managed. He names all that is necessary, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and these he says he can make...His power continues to grow. Nitrogen fertilizers, potash, iron sulphate...what he gives her she takes without asking...he says she cannot continue without him...he says he protects her from predators with dieldrin, chlordane,...that he has rid her of pests...And he devises ways to separate himself from her. He sends machines to do his

labor...His efforts are more astonishing than hers...
In his mind he no longer relies on her. What he
possesses, he says, is his to use and abandon.⁴

In their efforts to raise crops, to raise their standard
of living, the human beings raise themselves above creation,
men raise themselves above women, cities above the country,
and the GNP above nurturing labor.

The process of getting food and shelter from the elements
changed from wandering, wooing and wondering to destroy, de-
fine and demand. The agricultural system is mining the soil
because it tears up, drills through or de-skins the land
organism so as to extract more efficiently the energy-rich
carbon molecule stored in the dirt.⁵ It would be as if the
mosquito developed the capacity to peel off human skin in
order to expose the blood vessels and veins. With the in-
creased food supply it could then multiply its population and
even invent more efficient ways of cleaning up.⁶ Eventually,

⁴ Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her
(San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 52-53.

⁵ Wes Jackson, lecture at The Campbell Farm, 27 June 1986.

⁶ The obsession many civilizations have with cleanliness
must be related to both the storage of food and the stationary
lifestyle. Whether this can also be linked to the demand for
ritual cleanliness would make an interesting study. David
Hopkins has written about some of the connections between
Hebrew religion and agriculture in The Highlands of Canaan
(Decatur, Ill.: Almond, 1985) but does not consider cleanliness.
Four major works have sought to understand the historical
connection between agriculture and environmental degradation:
Andrew Goudie, The Human Impact on the Natural Environment
(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Tom Dale and Vernon Gill Carter,
Topsoil and Civilization (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press,
1955); Walter C. Lowdermilk, The Conquest of the Land Through
7,000 Years (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture
Information Bulletin No. 99., 1939); and Edward Hyams. Soil
and Civilization (New York: Harper/Colophon, 1952).

this type of parasitic agriculture exhausts the carrying capacity of its host. The skeletons of these hosts--as leftover rocks, sand and clay in deserts and denuded slopes--dot the landscape wherever humans have attempted this first step toward civilization.

Because of this proclivity for destruction, some observers such as Paul Shepard⁷ have begun to question the very notion of civilization. Perhaps creating agriculture, he queries, was an evolutionary mistake comparable to the larger⁸ brains of violent hominids. The implication is that a step backward to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle might indeed be a step forward.

Other thinkers have noted how important this change to agricultural values has been to the development of the rational mind. Significant ideological changes which corresponded to the rapid development in human civilization were the importance of time and reflection this new system of food production entailed. The philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead,

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Paul Shepard, The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1973). The only ecological justification for the existence of civilized humans that I discovered in the large body of literature on this subject was in Eric Rust's Nature: Garden or Desert (Waco: Word, 1971). In this book he asserts that for millions of years nature had been putting up a block in the chemical cycle through the setting aside of the carbon atom out of circulation, locked up in unavailable forms for millions of years by storing it in peat, lignite, oil and coal deposits. The humans by excavating this and restoring it to the atmosphere are providing a service to all plants and animals; however, he still believes we need to slow down the rate at which we are releasing it.

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Shepard, 276-78.

cites the importance of agriculture as marking "the first decisive step towards modern civilization. Its introduction marks the arrival of a stage of high grade reflection upon the course of events."⁹ It is no coincidence that the beginning of agriculture marks the beginning of theology and organized religion. The reflection upon "forecasting," "waiting," "capriciousness of weather" and "mystery of germination" are all motives for theological insight. Such values as cleanliness, discipline, sacrifice, thriftiness, saving, and lawfulness are peculiar to agricultural civilization and are integrally sustained by theology and ethics. Also, with the advent of agriculture the natural fecundity of the earth is no longer enough to support the increased needs of an urban population so "fertility" becomes something which is prayed for. A final agricultural justification is sought from theology as regards future considerations: giving up something that you really want in the present for some future reward is important to agriculture, so "sacrifice" becomes a central ceremony.¹⁰ The connections between theology and agriculture are strong.

Religions and philosophies in these civilizations have largely ignored or justified this destruction of rural

⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, The Adventures of Ideas (New York: Free Press, 1967), 110.

¹⁰ See Shepard, 18-19. He attributes many other theological themes to the peasant mentality: large families, battles between matriarchy and patriarchy, attribution of misfortune to a god, use of magic and vengeance, decorum and sobriety, fertility, festivals, unity and loyalty. Hopkins, 272 ff., connects many of these same theological and ritualistic practices with Biblical religion.

lands, peoples and animals. Such ignorance could be caused by the location of most schools of metaphysical thought in urban metropolises. Sometimes this ignorance is manifest in a conscious avoidance of earthly topics. The focus on otherworldly issues has left their flocks ill-equipped to deal with the destruction going on around them. One cynical critic has suggested that religions play the part of the "con artist" who gets the "mark" to look upward while another "con" picks the pockets clean.

At other times, religions and philosophies have played a justification role. For this purpose some have sought to create the scenario whereby the physical world is not considered real--it is merely an illusion, out of which the soul must be born. God and the spirit dwell elsewhere. Therefore, whatever happens here is unimportant. In fact, as further justification, the demise of the physical landscape can be used as proof of its illusory quality.

Some other religious responses have included the notion that the creation must be given over to deserving humans by a supreme deity. They can then wipe the slate clean with an ax, plough or a pavement and put what they want there.

Judeo-Christian Tradition

Much in the Judeo-Christian traditions has followed these same patterns of ignorance and justification. Some critics have gone so far as to blame the entire environmental crisis on the Bible and its adherents. This is not the place to make

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a defence against this accusation. However, a quick glance at what the Mayan, Indus, Greek, Roman and many other cultures did to their soils should take the onus off Western Christendom. What is proper to this study is the response of the Judeo-Christian traditions as they became aware of this degradation process.

More than many other religions the Biblical ones provided "dikes" to slow down the erosion. The foundation of the physical world as "good" and directly related to God makes a "worldview" theologically significant.¹² The decentralized worship and social organization of the Judges provided a less intensive abuse of the land.¹³ The ownership patterns of the land found in the Law were conducive to more small-scale use. That "the earth is the Lord's" provided stewardship themes and symbols.¹⁴ The prophets tied justice to a relationship with the land.¹⁵ The incarnation of God in Jesus should have dealt the death blow to all purely transcendent and

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See Lynn White, Jr., "Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," Ecology and Religion in History, eds. David Spring and Eileen Spring (New York: Harper/Torchbooks, 1974).

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Odil Hannes Steck, World and Environment (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980); Rolf Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," manuscript, n.d.

13

Norman Gottwald, The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979).

14

Douglas John Hall, The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age (New York: Friendship Press, 1982).

15

See Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 90ff. Aldo Leopold has claimed the Hebrew

other-worldly images of God. Jesus' emphasis on simplicity of human needs, and their provision without anxiety, is reminiscent of many pre-agricultural societies.¹⁶ The creator-creation relationship, throughout the Bible, is a paradigm of trust and justice not rapaciousness.

Such being the case that there is much to commend in the Biblical tradition for sustainable relationships with the creation, then it is that much more curious why its practitioners have been even more efficient and effective than others in waging war on the creation. That the Promised Land no longer flows with milk and honey but requires large inputs of energy for the Israelis to bring forth food is but one example of how our tradition has turned fertile lands into wastelands.¹⁷ An even more telling example is that it has taken the new Exodus pilgrims to a new Promised Land--America--an even shorter time to mine away its topsoil.

A response to the contrast between the Biblical witness and the Christian reality of destruction has been to fault sin--as if humans could not help but wreak havoc upon the land. Yet, such a response does not do justice to the thousands of

prophets as ancestors of his land ethic: "Individual thinkers, since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoilation of land is not only inexpedient, but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief." Jackson, 92.

¹⁶ Gerd Theissen, Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

¹⁷

See Lowdermilk, 6-10.

years in which humans appeared to do little damage to their eco-system. This is why it is so important to delve deeper into some of the sociological changes which transpired at the same time as ecological degradation was beginning.

Rural--Urban

Cities
are bulwarks
from which the inhabitants
break out
and raid
the countryside 18

Hindu Poem

Closely connected with this theological worldview is the sociological one which divides reality into dichotomies of "organized - disorganized," "rational - irrational," "complex - simple." Categories are devised whereby the nomadic herders are pitted against the hunters, the farmers pitted against the shepherds (Cain vs. Abel), the city slickers pitted against the rural folk. The nomads are "higher" than the hunters, the agriculturalists a step beyond the nomads, the urban proletariat more developed than the peasants, and, now, the suburban information economy more advanced than the industrialists. Such categories divide and isolate groups rather than helping them to recognize the connections between them. In each case of prejudice, that which is perceived to be closer to nature (i.e. having more physical contact with the environment and less control over it) is denigrated by that which is consi-

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Richard Lannoy, The Speaking Tree (London: André Deutsch, 1983), x.

dered more mental or spiritual.

An example of this division found in Western civilization is the way organized Christianity since the third century A.D. has understood the non-urban populace. That the church defined unbelievers as "barbarians," "pagans" and "heathen" was no coincidence: there was a definite bias against those who lived close to nature. The people who lived in the woods, in the fields and on the heath represented a life attached to the earth and, as a result, were degraded as lesser beings. And the formation of Protestant theology in the budding city-life of the Renaissance has deeply affected its relationship to the countryside. Luther helped to squelch the peasant revolts of his day in part because he had little understanding of their physical or spiritual needs or strengths.

Indeed, there has been a general bias against the countryside in most urban civilizations. Perhaps this is because no civilization has yet been able to develop a sustainable relationship with the countryside which gave it birth. Lowdermilk gave the first detailed account of this degradation¹⁹ by cities. He made the poignant insight that civilizations will rise and fall on the same land until that land is exhausted. His basic thesis is that the land--if fertile--will continue producing more civilizations no matter which barbarians take it over. Dale and Carter expanded this thesis in 1955 with their book, Topsoil and Civilization. They counter

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Lowdermilk, 3-4.

the argument that it was changes in climate which caused these ecosystems to decay:

...to propose that civilization was chased from Babylon to London by a creeping drought is not reasonable. The evidence for climate as a destroyer of civilization is vague or non-existent; the evidence of soil erosion is there for all to see.²⁰

It appears that many people in civilizations have been quick to blame "acts of God"--such as the climate--for the demise of their lifestyles, and slow to see the despotic relationship they have maintained with their rural environment.

This is not to say that urban observers have never spoken positively about the creation and its more earthy inhabitants. The point assumed here, though, is that many of these visions are jaded by romanticism. One of my favorite poets on these matters, Wendell Berry, has stated, "We romanticize what we first despise."²¹ I believe this is an accurate estimation of many of the more positive feelings and thoughts about the rural life. Another writer notes this trend in America:

When the land could not be conquered by technology, it was often subdued by sentimentalizing it in popular art and music. The prints of Currier and Ives, for example, often present a romanticized version of the land...as a pleasant place to bike, drive, or have a picnic, but not as a place to live and labor.²²

In much of Western literature, rural people and culture are rarely portrayed as equals, deserving of respect and a

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Dale and Carter, 61.

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Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977), 56.

²²

Sorokin, 20.

just recompense for their labors. Some might argue that there is a strong tradition of critique leveled against life in the city throughout western thought. This is true. Unfortunately, most of it has not come from the theological community. Whenever this critique did have Church origins it was usually set in the context of despair over all earthly existence--that here we have no lasting city. Ironically, in many of these accounts heaven is still pictured as a celestial city. Few accounts, outside the First Testament prophets, take seriously the connection that many of the problems the city people face originate in their dealings with the country.

Modern Philosophy and Theology

There is even less to commend much of the 19th and 20th century philosophical and theological traditions to an ecological ethic. Several examples are the utilitarian, Kantian and Barthian traditions. Utilitarians such as Bentham and Mill admitted the inevitability of human selfishness but, also, that the humans had the freedom to maximize their welfare. Often this search for maximum utility would lead to decisions which incorporated a larger sphere of interest--what is good for everyone is good for me. Yet, more likely, the interests of those in power carried greater weight and utilitarian considerations usually sanctified the status quo. Kant, paradoxically, believed in a strict determinism for the physical world yet tried to create a non-naturalistic ethic. The only way one could be certain that an act was virtuous was if it went against one's natural inclinations. In fact, Kant's ecological dictum could probably be summarized as "Live contrary

to nature." Truly, when Alfred North Whitehead defined metaphysics as an attempt to understand the relationship among God - Universe - Individuals he was out of step with either of these philosophical traditions.

What metaphysics requires is a solution exhibiting the plurality of individuals as consistent with the unity of the Universe, and a solution which exhibits the World as requiring its union with God, and God as requiring his Union with the World. ²³

He is suggesting that no such dichotomy or trichotomy between God, creation and humans can be made. Nothing--not even God--exists in isolation. All realms of life--including agriculture and rural life--are subjects for inclusion in a rational metaphysic. Unfortunately, most of the theological and philosophical thinkers have not taken Whitehead's challenge seriously but rather have continued such compartmentalization.

If the ignorance of metaphysical anthropology and terminology was evident in modern philosophical circles it was also not a major concern in the theological camp. The triumph of what H. Paul Santmire calls the "spiritual motif" was well documented in his book The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology.²⁴ Especially for Karl Barth, but even for Teilhard de Chardin, the metaphor of ascent is the dominant motif for describing human relationships with the world. There is an "unbridled ethic of

²³ Alfred North Whitehead, 168.

²⁴ Paul Santmire, The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Promise of Christian Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

conquest directed toward nature" in both.²⁵ Nature is merely to be used, having no redemption or purpose of its own.

Summary

...the front (like the trenches in WWI) is made up of peasant populations...millions of children die in such places every year, thanks to our economic system, which has killed more people than Hitler, Stalin, the Shah and Pinochet put together...²⁶

There's a time bomb ticking out there in rural America today. If it explodes, ripple effects will be far-reaching, perhaps devastating.²⁷

Awareness of these contexts of rural degradation in the past should awaken us to global destruction of land, forests, watersheds, minerals, air, and rural peoples in the present. Much of the rural countryside all over the world has already exploded or, better yet, "imploded." That is, as the water and mineral resources are mined out, like a sinkhole, whatever buildings and people the land is supporting are swallowed up to restore the imbalance. This mining has taken place as a conscious policy of urban civilizations. Whatever is found outside the city gates has been deemed a "resource" for the urban intellect to manipulate for its own glory and sustenance. Recent studies by Francis Moore Lappé and others have shown that disruptions of the rural culture such as massive

²⁵ Santmire, 173.

²⁶ René Dumont, Stranglehold On Africa (London: André Deutsch, 1983), x.

²⁷ Kiplinger Agricultural Letter, 55, no. 7, 20 March 1984: 1.

hunger, farm bankruptcy and depopulation are not inevitable but have been propagated for the purposes of keeping food prices low for urban masses, collectivizing the land for urban taxation, and providing cheap labor for urban development.²⁸ The urban world often seeks to use the virginal resources of the country for its temporary enjoyment then cast it aside when it reaches exhaustion and go out in search of more pristine environments. Some, like Spengler would say that the city can not help but take advantage of the country. It's the nature of the beast:

This, then, is the conclusion of the city's history; growing from primitive barter centre to Culture city and at last to world city, it sacrifices first the blood and soul of its creators to the needs of its majestic evolution, and then the last flower of that growth to the spirit of civilization...²⁹

Such exploitation has appeared to be inevitable even by some of the more sensitive observers.

Thus, the roots of rural degradation run deep. They extend into the earliest records of human civilization, including the very foundations of agriculture. With the assistance of new technology and new metaphysics, the human species has efficiently extracted rural resources. Time and again it has done this to the exhaustion point. The philosophical and religious traditions which grew up with civilization did little to counteract this degradation process

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See Francis Moore Lappé, World Hunger: Twelve Myths (New York: Grove, 1986); Susan George, How the Other Half Dies (Montclair, N.J.: Allanheld Osmun, 1977).

²⁹

Sorokin, 259.

and often promoted it. These traditions by and large neglected to connect their metaphysics to the historical, ecological and cultural context--which context was often crying out for help.

Given this context, it should not surprise those working on rural renewal how insensitive are the ears of those who are in the caring professions. In a very real way, their jobs, lifestyles, and metaphysics are dependent upon rural degradation. Without the understanding of this context, it is easy to become disheartened or lash out at a "culprit," be that a banker, farm policy, consumer or city power. It is important to realize that the "rural crisis" is nothing new. The time bomb ticking in rural America today has been set off in countless areas of the world in many periods of history.

It is important, now, to turn to the twentieth-century American context and examine four case studies of efforts made by churches to reverse this degradation process. For, in stark contrast to much of the above context, they display the concerted efforts of communities of humans to understand, evaluate and pragmatically demonstrate rural renewal.

CHAPTER 3

Four Church Rural Renewal Projects

Having examined the global, social and theological contexts of rural degradation, it is now important to turn our attention to the four case studies of church renewal efforts. It will be helpful first, though, to further illuminate the American context by describing three postures toward creation which preceded the 20th century. These three--Agrarianism, Transcendentalism, and Arcadianism--often will be referred to in the course of the case study analysis.

Background

We ruin the lands that are already cleared and either cut down more wood, if we have it or emigrate into the western country....A half, a third or even a fourth of what land we mangle, well wrought and properly dressed, would produce more than the whole under our system of management, yet such is the force of habit, that we cannot depart from it. ¹ George Washington

The heightened awareness of rural degradation which influenced the general public in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was in large part because of the closing of this western frontier. Also, the rapid urbanization caused many to take notice of lost nature and country values. The first phase of this was Agrarian Populism, the second Romanticism and Transcendentalism, and the third phase

¹ Jackson, 41.

Arcadianism. Each of these movements was chiefly motivated by the sense of alienation modern civilization brought to the human spirit and the practical wisdom that something very central to human existence was being destroyed.

Agrarianism

One of the earliest proponents of Agrarianism was Thomas Jefferson. He believed that democracy itself was founded on the unique opportunity Americans had to own and farm small plots of land. His chief concern was to protect this right² from urban, financial forces which sought to usurp it. Andrew Jackson and William Jennings Bryant carried the banner of Agrarianism in the 19th century.

Many agrarians leaned toward, if not espoused, the Deist concept of a Watchmaker God. This god had set the creation in motion and it was the human's privilege to study its law, order and harmony. Farming, because of its close contact with the laws of nature, was considered by Jefferson to be the ideal vocation for a human. Jefferson scorned both manufacturing and cities as "panders of vice."³ The farming life, to the contrary, promoted virtues necessary for self-government: discipline, self-reliance, a love for freedom, and care for one's community. Farmers were the "most valuable citizens."⁴

² Ekirch, 17-20.

³ Berry, The Unsettling, 144.

⁴ Berry, The Unsettling, 143.

Some historians have claimed that it was this agrarian dream which partly fueled the engines of land expansion into Florida, the Louisiana Purchase, the war with Canada, the Oregon Country and the Mexican-American War.⁵ Jefferson himself, though, believed that it was the unfulfilled ideals of agrarianism which caused the westward expansion:

...The long succession of years of stunted crops, of reduced prices, the general prostration of the farming business, under levies for the support of manufacturers, etc., with the calamitous fluctuations of value in our paper medium, have kept agriculture in a state of abject depression, which has peopled the Western States by silently breaking up those on the Atlantic....⁶

In other words, agrarianism was not an idealistic vision of a "promised land" in a utopia, but, rather, a pragmatic philosophy for farmers to band together and defend themselves against the domination by urban classes.⁷

Agrarian sentiments were expressed politically in the Populist movements of both the Jacksonian era and the last decade of the nineteenth century. Even still, in the twentieth century, a noted philosopher such as Santayana would hold the position that,

⁵ This view was represented by both Ekirch, 18, and Carl Degler in Out of Our Past: The Forces that Shaped Modern America (New York: Harper/Colophon, 1970), 104-109.

⁶ Berry, 144.

⁷ See Ekirch, 20-21. He asserts that it was not its idealism which was its weakness. Jefferson was not a European primitivist like Rousseau. Rather, Ekirch claims that he did not adequately organize the farm sector, nor confront the philosophical alternative of nature domination.

The natural state of mankind ...is that of an animal economy, in which men live by agriculture, and the hunting or breeding of animals. "They are materially and morally rooted in the earth...They are civilized."⁸

Santayana recognized the city's dependence upon a healthy rural economy to provide it with its resources, tolls, laborers and military.

Transcendentalism

The nineteenth century brought dramatic changes to the American rural and urban communities. The Industrial Revolution transformed countrysides within lifetimes. The rapid advances made by science and technology alarmed many sensitive observers. It seemed that feelings, emotions and values were being sacrificed on the altar of brute fact and gross product. In factories, laboratories and government agencies Nature was being murdered in order to disseminate material wealth, dissect the mysteries of life, and displace once stable communities.

The reaction against these trends was transcendentalism. Dismayed by the rapid destruction of Nature, they reacted by proclaiming a reverence for Nature. Wordsworth was "drunk with Nature";⁹ and Thoreau extolled Nature's vitality.¹⁰ Unlike the earlier agrarians these writers concentrated their praises not

⁸ Morton White and Lucia White, The Intellectual Versus the City (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), 187.

⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York: Free Press, 1967), 83.

¹⁰ Santmire, 141.

on tamed agricultural landscapes but on wilderness themes. Like Rousseau's Noble Savage they wanted to venture into Nature to highlight the contrast between its wild fecundity and the industrial society's sterility. With passion Thoreau asserted, "In wildness is the preservation of the world."¹¹

The Enlightenment and Deism had determined the validity of revelation from Nature's workings but it was these Transcendentalists who articulated its mysteries and "communed" with it. With Schleiermacher they wanted to revivify the spiritual element in Nature.¹² True religion was the "feeling of unity with all that is."¹³ It is a philosophy based on subjectivism and idealism. Nature is defined as "not me."¹⁴ It is a "holy other." It has no will to oppose God and therefore can act as mediator and teacher for the alienated human soul. Sometimes called "Natural Supernaturalism" or "Romanticism," transcendentalism was the devoted study of the Creator's footsteps in order to "suck Divinity from the flowers of

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White and White, 33. Thoreau goes on to express the need to "articulate the other side of life....I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness - to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement....for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school-committee and every one of you will take care of that."

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George S. Hendry, Theology of Nature (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 67.

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Hendry, 38.

14

Hendry, 68.

¹⁵
Nature."

For many Romanticists, reason was to be distrusted as a degradation of instinct. The abstractions of both science and rationalism receive condemnation. According to Emerson the true philosopher or poet "never reasons, never proves [but] simply perceives."¹⁶ The true essence of Nature eludes the analytical eye of science. Its mystery haunts us. The thoughts of a primrose are "too deep for tears" and the best response¹⁷ to the daffodils is to laugh with them.

Ironically, it is many twentieth century scientists who, perhaps, can lay the best claim to being progeny of these Romanticists.¹⁸ Albert Schweitzer was one of the bridges between them. His "reverence for life" ethic has infused much of the ethos of modern scientists. Though personally he be-¹⁹moaned the "ecological pyramid" --that the Will-to-Live immanent in all things required the death of other beings--he

¹⁵ Cited in Clarence J. Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), 426. As another quotation of Sir Thomas Browne depicts, nature reveals a greater reality beyond itself: "There are two books from whence I collect my Divinity, beside that written one of God, another of His servant Nature, that universal and public manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the eyes of all; those that never saw Him in the one, have discovered Him in the other." Hendry, 56.

¹⁶ White and White, 25.

¹⁷ Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, 83.

¹⁸ This relationship shall be further detailed in Chapter 5.

¹⁹ Albert Schweitzer, Reverence for Life, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

believed that the whole Universe was alive with the reality of God. Nature, for Schweitzer, was not "an accidental bit of cold machinery which is destined for a cosmic slag pile,"²⁰ but each part has intrinsic value and purpose. Every attempt should be made to avoid killing any creature. The truly ethical person,

...when working by lamplight on a summer night...
would rather keep the windows closed and breathe
stuffy air than see insect after insect fall on the
table with wings that are singed. 21

Though transcendentalists of both nineteenth and twentieth centuries varied in occupation and religion, they were principally occupied in surmounting human alienation from Nature by reenchanting it with the element of Spirit.

Arcadianism

This movement around the turn of the century should be considered a "back-to-nature" movement not a "back-to-land" one. Nature was not a place to make a living but a "resource." Arcadia was a "scene of simple pleasure and untroubled quiet."²² Peter Schmitt describes it,

As a place it lay somewhere on the urban fringe,
easily accessible and mildly wild, the goal of a "nature
movement" led by teachers and preachers, bird-watchers,
socialites, scout leaders, city-planners, and inarticulate
commuters....²³

20 C. Alan Anderson, The Problem is God (Walpole, N.H.: Stillpoint, 1985), 255.

21

Hendry, 200.

22

Schmitt, xvii.

23

Schmitt, xvii.

The predominant relationship to creation exhibited by Arcadians was "to be in the country but not of it." Country clubs, nature and travel magazines, camping, all served to provide a country experience without country neighbors. Country life journals had little to do with raising food crops. In fact there was a certain disdain for farmers who did not seem to notice nature's beauties but rather treated it with utilitarian efficacy.

Similarly in the church a romanticized vision of Nature was revelatory of God's "smiles," "art" and "thoughts." Peter Schmitt notices how this movement affected the churches,

Capitalizing on America's discovery of the out-of-doors, they began to argue about the significance of God's Works as well as His Word. ²⁴

Hymns proclaiming the wonder and beauty of Nature and the country church were popularized such as "Little Brown Church in the Wildwood," "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," "God Bless America."²⁵ The "out -of-doorsness" of Jesus and his words were hailed as the foundation of a pure, simple, natural religion which could bring "peace in the heart" to anxious urbanites. The Boy Scouting movement was so closely tied to the churches in its inception because it provided wholesome activity in the "great out-of-doors."

This Arcadian movement contained elements of both Agrarianism and Transcendentalism but actively transformed both. It

²⁴ Schmitt, 141.

²⁵ Schmitt, 142.

represented neither a desire to maintain small farmers nor to leave Nature wild. Rather it sought to fence it in: leaving some of it semi-wild for hiking and camping, manicuring the rest for suburban sensibilities.

Thus, by the turn of the century, Americans had become more and more estranged from the reality of rural life. They preferred the week-end excursion to the country over the sweaty, impoverished lifestyle of the American farmer. More and more, the countryside was becoming a landscape to which an anxious urban middle class might retreat for peace of mind and spiritual renewal. The family farm was becoming an antique which many families preserved but did not use for living. It was a place to gather at Christmas or for family reunions. "Grandma's house" over the dale was a spiritual root from which many displaced urbanites could go to feel at home.

At the same time, though, there was a certain amount of recognition that something was amiss. The countryside to which they were escaping was rapidly degenerating. Farms were deserted and small towns were being boarded up. Abandoned schools and churches littered the rural areas. Some Americans were aware of the destruction of rural lands and culture. A search began into the depths of the Judeo-Christian tradition and these three American metaphysics--Agrarianism, Transcendentalism and Arcadianism--for rational explanations and possible solutions to rural degradation. American churches were at the forefront of this effort. It is now important to detail four case studies which exemplify where that search led.

First Case Study: The Country Life Movement

That gospel which does not concern itself with man's body, mind and environment, as well as his soul, is a contradiction in terms....If we cannot make our politics part of our religion, we have no right to cast even a vote....26

Background

One of the most profound changes to come upon the church at the turn of the century was that the church should not only be concerned about individuals but also communities. Without going into all the causes of what came to be called the Social Gospel, suffice it to say that urbanization was a major factor. Just as the Transcendentalist and Romantic poets had been shocked 50 years previously by industrialization so, too, were the Christian churches' sensibilities finally awakened to the powerful forces wreaking havoc on some of their most cherished institutions. A lost sense of community, moral decay, detachment from nature, and rampant materialism stirred the urban conscience. Gladden, Royce and Rauschenbusch all sought sanctification of the community over against the individual piety of traditional orthodox doctrine. Distinctions between the secular and sacred became less and less clear. The mechanics of communion among humans became as important if not more than that relationship developed between humans and God.

Accompanying this development of the Social Gospel in the church was a renaissance of rural romanticism. As one writer

26

D.W. Bebbington, "The City, the Countryside, and the Social Gospel in Late Victorian Nonconformity," The Church in Town and Countryside, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 418.

described this idyllic rural spirituality,

The landscape of the farm is full of Divine feeling, and rich in suggestions that inspire calm and quicken industry. It throbs with the tender heart of God. It is alive. In its simple and steady processes it reveals the Father's care for His child, and invites him to steady and healthful toil in obedience to its laws....²⁷

The rapid migration of farmers into the city was to this rural romanticism what the "closing of the wilderness" was to the Arcadian myth. Though the Arcadian myth had become the dominant social force in moving people to the suburbs, preserving wilderness areas and creating "country clubs," it was largely in the churches that attention was turned to the plight of rural lands and communities. Initially, most of these churches and ministers were urban and their concern can be attributed partly to a belief that rural values could help to solve the ills of urban life. However, as time wore on and they came to study the reality behind the romantic facade, their motivation was out of dismay for the rapid crumbling of that very life they were glamorizing.

It was a Presbyterian minister, Warren H. Wilson, who was one of the first to combine the Social Gospel and rural consciousness. Alarmed at the rural decay he perceived in the farm community of his boyhood he, like many other recent urban immigrants, began to take action. With a sociological training, and after a pastorate in the rural community of Quaker Hill, N.Y., Wilson eagerly studied the problems faced by rural ministers and churches. It was his recognition that the health

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Bebbington, 418-419.

of the church and the health of the rural community were intimately intertwined that was particularly innovative. In 1908 he sought to create a department of the rural church within the Presbyterian national office with the purpose of revitalizing rural churches and communities.²⁸

At about the same time, President Theodore Roosevelt, at the instigation of Gifford Pinchot, formed a Country Life Commission in 1908 to examine American rural life using the survey method. The results of this study confirmed what Wilson and others were already suspecting: the economic, social, ecological, and moral life of the rural sector was rapidly degenerating. The principal cause of this decline, it concluded, was a decline in the moral vitality of rural people. Therefore, its solutions were primarily education oriented. The isolation and monotony experienced by farm women could be solved by formation of women's organizations and implementation of the telephone. The demise of land and water could be reversed through soil conservation education. Economic progress could be furthered by bringing industrial methods onto the farm.²⁹ A remedy for poor health and sanitation

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Merwin Swanson, "The 'Country Life Movement' and the American Churches", Church History 45 (September 1977): 358-365.

29

Many industrialists for both business and philanthropic purposes became involved in demonstration farms and the improvement of the county extension system. Such men were James Hill, John D. Rockefeller, and Julius Rosenwald as well as many merchant, banking and industrial associations. Bowers, 18.

could be found in public school hygiene education. The publication of the effects of land speculation would be enough effort, it was hoped, to stop this devastating practice.

One of the other conclusions of this study was that the church could and should play a prominent role in any type of rural renewal. This new role was defined as nothing less than a progressive reordering of rural life:

Any consideration of the problem of rural life that leaves out of account the function and the possibilities of the Church, and of related institutions, would be grossly inadequate. This is not because in the last analysis the country-life problem is a moral problem, or that in the best development of the individual the great motives and results are religious or spiritual, but because from the pure sociological point of view the Church is fundamentally a necessary institution in country life. In a peculiar way the Church is intimately related to the agricultural industry....The time has arrived when the Church must take a larger leadership, both as an institution and through its pastors, in the social reorganization of rural life.the Church has an indispensable function as a conservator of morals. But from the social point of view, it is to hold aloft the torch of personal and community idealism. It must be a leader in the attempt to idealize country life.³⁰

The church should not only foment against sin but also take an active part in preventing its germination. It could do this by encouraging social reorganization and promoting a rural life ideal--a philosophy of rural life as it was later called.

Shortly after the publication of this report there was an institutional response from the Catholic and Protestant denominations. The Presbyterians inaugurated their Department of

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From "The Report of the Country Life Commission", cited in Warren H. Wilson, The Church of the Open Country (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1911), 176.

Church and Country Life in 1910. Due to the prodding of rural sociologist Edmund deS. Brunner the Moravian Brethren founded³¹ their Country Church Commission in 1912. Another rural sociologist, Paul Vogt, played a prominent role for the Methodist Episcopal Church, organizing a Department of Rural Church Work³² in 1916. The Federal Council of Churches, which itself had only begun in 1908, took on as one of its first commissions to be a clearinghouse for Country Life materials. A Church and Country Life Commission was formed in 1913 under the direction of George Frederick Wells and Gifford Pinchot. In 1923 the Catholic Church set up its National Catholic Rural Life Conference. Many of the rest followed suit, so that by 1945 almost every Christian denomination had an organizational department whose major area of concern was the church and rural life.

The initiation of these commissions, however, did not guarantee that rural issues were finally a legitimate concern of the Church. According to Merwin Swanson, the combined forces of conservative individualism and urban churches which did not want to see resources going to the rural areas caused several of these commissions to close by the early 1920s. One example of this opposition happened in the Presbyterian Church. Swanson discovered that,

When Warren H. Wilson argued that rural churches

31

Benson Y. Landis, "National Interdenominational Rural Church Programs, 1912-1915," Town and Country Church, no. 118 (October 1956): 1-3.

32

Landis, 2.

should act as the leading institution in rural community development, he implicitly subordinated the importance of personal salvation, and conservative ministers and laymen reacted sharply. Furthermore, urban liberal Presbyterians, despite their theoretical link with the country life movement, often opposed directing church resources toward rural projects, and thus they joined conservatives in opposing country life programs. 33

The Federal Council of Churches continued to operate a Rural Department but on a much reduced scale after Gifford Pinchot pulled out his donations in 1918. When several of these closed departments reopened in the late twenties and early thirties, they did so as "town and country church" departments. These lost the general appeal to community life and federated churches in favor of a more parochial denominational affiliation. More often than not these new departments were placed under a "home missions" agency and their primary purpose was evangelism and church growth. 34

The Problem

As might be expected from the preponderance of sociologists in the leadership of the Country Life movement, the principal problem affecting rural culture was its community life--or lack thereof. The geographic isolation of the American farm system was contrasted with the village life of Europe. The competitiveness of the farm economy in America was also considered a factor increasing loneliness. According to

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Swanson, 370.

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Merwin Swanson believes that this essentially marks the end of the "country life" movement, 370-73. However, many of the same leaders and writers continued to be active in these town and country departments and in new programs as described in the following case studies.

Swanson, much that had once helped to ameliorate rural life was now gone:

Neighborhood activities like barn-raisings, husking parties, and quilting-bees, had disappeared, and left rural individuals isolated in a drab world.³⁵

Many of these rural sociologists had been raised on farms and in small towns and were distressed at the changes they saw happening in the country.

Also, the farm's lack of education and cultural opportunities was seen as a reason for the attraction to youth of the city's delights. This was because the farming community lacked a vision for its place in the Progressive society's desire to improve life. Thus, one of the basic problems was a lack of spiritual leadership. The ministers and school teachers were not providing the challenges to improve life in the country.

This lack of spiritual leadership was also considered the cause of the moral decay growing in rural communities. According to one Christian sociologist, each community was perceived as having a "local prostitute" who was "the demoralizing agent of the country community."³⁶ The advent of new mechanization had provided country boys with too much time on their hands and not enough constructive activity to fill it with. Thus, contends Edmund deS. Brunner,

We could preach endlessly against fornication, but if all young men had to do in their free time was to

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Swanson, 358.

36

Edwin L. Earp, The Rural Church Movement (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1914), 127.

loaf at the corner drugstore and watch girls go by,
the devil would catch them before we caught them.³⁷

There was a lack in the quality of the ministers such that they did not have the leadership and charisma to draw these young people into more sanctified activities like youth and singing groups, scouting, sports or social clubs.

Many reasons were given for the poor quality of leadership in rural churches. Many pastors were thought to be unwilling to stray from strict doctrinal or ethnic demands. Others were accused of intolerance for social pleasures such as Saturday night dances and Sunday baseball. Some were simply "putting in time" before retiring or moving to an urban pulpit, while others were overburdened with multiple parish pastorates. The isolation dispirited many and other rural ministers lived in towns and commuted out to their churches. The pay and the travel over rough country roads were also considerations for improvement. One reformer blamed the colleges and seminaries for "urbanitis"--an educational policy turning young country men and women away from the rural sector toward city interests. As a result, Mr. Earp concludes, all the strong rural youth have gone to work in the cities while "we have sent to the country churches... the super-annuates, the incompetents, or the novices, to guard and work this vast resource field of the Kingdom."³⁸ Not only were many pulpits

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Swanson, 361.

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Earp, 165.

vacated but many which were occupied had ministers considered desultory, despirited and intellectually dense.

Noticeably lacking in the definition of the problem for these country-lifers was the anti-urban sentiment of the earlier Agrarian movement. Neither was there any mention that the economic problems faced by the farmers could have been due to mechanization and the opening of vast acreages in the West. Perhaps this was because its leadership was largely urban, though with farm backgrounds, and middle-class, and well-educated. The country-life leaders were mostly comprised of people whose prosperity depended on the farmer's prosperity or whose altruism had some direct link to parents or relatives still trying to farm.

Interestingly enough, though, in the light of recent concerns about soil stewardship, these country-lifers did direct attention at one of the problems which would come to fruition 20 years later in the Dust Bowl: soil erosion. Earp noted that the rural churches should make a priority of leadership to reverse the trends of soil erosion, deforestation and flooding.³⁹ The following quotation reveals that Earp was not aware that there might be some correlation between economic individualism and resource abuse but that he did recognize the latter as a serious problem. He wrote,

In the open country has been developed in the past the splendid, heroic individuality that has produced the religious, moral, economic, and political lead-

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Earp, 9.

ership of all ages, while at the same time, it is here we discover today the greatest national waste of resources natural, human and spiritual.⁴⁰

Another country-life leader, Liberty Hyde Bailey, also made several references to the loss of both topsoil and fertility in his book The Holy Earth.⁴¹ As with Earp and other writers, Bailey did not make scientific assessments of the extent or causes of land degeneration. Rather, he and the others simply offered personal and historical examples of this problem.

Theology

As previously mentioned the theology of the Social Gospel pervaded much of the motives and strategies of the Country Life Movement. The roots of the rural problem, from the Social Gospel perspective, rested in the emphasis on individualism and personal piety at the expense of cooperation and taking action to improve one's social environment. Inherent in a social theology must be a changed world-view. Rather than the world being a wreck from which the church should try to "save" as many individual souls, the world was reframed as the very "community" to which the church is married. As Thomas Nixon Carver argues,

If the Church will assume that the world is not going to perdition, that it is going to last for a long time, and that it will eventually be a Christian or a non-Christian world, according as Christians or non-Christians prove themselves more fit to possess it - according as they are better farmers,

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Earp, 13.

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Liberty Hyde Bailey, The Holy Earth (1915; reprint, New York: Christian Rural Fellowship, 1943).

better businessmen, better mechanics, better politicians - then the Church will turn its attention more and more to the making of better and more progressive farmers, businessmen, mechanics, and politicians.⁴²

In other words, if rural people are suffering then the church is or should be suffering with it. The church should be so much "in the world" that it acts as a weather vane for the society. If the church is prospering then so is the community and vice versa. If the church is blighted then chances are so, too, is the land and people.

Another theological development was almost without precedent; that is, integrating reflections were made on the relationship between God and the World, and between the humans and the rest of Nature. One of the principal figures in reformulating thoughts on these topics was Liberty Hyde Bailey, himself one of the members of President Roosevelt's Country Life Commission. His book, The Holy Earth, was one of the most well received works on these subjects and still stands today as a monument to ecological sensibility. In it, he first makes the argument that goodness is in the essence of the physical world. It is the job of religion to be concerned not about heaven or death--which he says the Bible is largely silent on --and to focus its attention on what is happening on this earth. In certain ways this resembles the message of the Social Gospel. But what is unique for Bailey is that he asserts this moral goodness for all of creation:

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Wilson, 22.

The earth is good in itself, and its products are good in themselves.⁴³

He goes on to say that all creatures including the humans intuit this goodness in their meals, sleep, rain and the exercise of their "natural powers" over particular problems. Holiness or divinity is attributed to all parts of the creation not because they are gods but because they were not made by the humans.

In addition, he asserts there is no such thing as a bi-modal creation. The humans are made out of the dust, the very stuff of creation, not created separately from some other source.⁴⁴ "The creation is one creation," Bailey attests. Because of this oneness the humans have an obligation to respect all of life. There is no "dead" matter; it is all in some sense alive. It is not a static worldview but one which is always changing, balancing, sometimes competing and most often cooperating. Humans have special powers to affect the creation in a dramatic fashion but this is a responsibility for creativity not destruction. Bailey asserts,

One cannot receive all these privileges without bearing the obligation to react and to partake, to keep, to cherish, and to co-operate.⁴⁵

How a society partitions and uses its land was for him as much a moral question as any other. Citing passages from the Old Testament and Paul that indicate the interconnection between

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Bailey, Holy Earth, 6.

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Bailey, Holy Earth, 5.

⁴⁵

Bailey, Holy Earth, 5.

human and non-human redemption he concludes that,

...a society that is founded on an unmoral partition and use cannot itself be righteous and whole.⁴⁶

This is one of the earliest statements extending theological standing and understanding to all the created order, which does not isolate the human soul as the primary relationship God has with the World.

This redemption for all creation would not be wrought by leaving it alone, according to Bailey, but rather by better human use. Humans who have a direct relationship with the creation must see themselves as artists. He foresees a time when farmers, miners and industrialists shall,

...construct great pictures out-of-doors. We shall assemble the houses, control the architecture, arrange the trees and the forest, direct the roads and fences, display the slopes of the hills, lay out the farms, remove every feature that offends the eye; and persons will leave the galleries, with their limitations and imitations, to go to the country to see some of the greatest works of art that man can make....⁴⁷

This is more an Arcadian vision than a Romantic, only translated, now, beyond the suburb and park to the whole of Nature.

Strategies

The belief that the church should be the farmer's source of idealism resulted in several practical programs. First, there was the whole move toward federation. This move to unite churches under non-sectarian labels was considered to be an example for farmers. It was hoped that if churches could

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Bailey, Holy Earth, 12.

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Liberty Hyde Bailey, The Outlook to Nature (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 86.

learn to overcome their divisions and cooperate then so might farmers. When President Woodrow Wilson addressed the Country Life Conference of 1915 in a speech titled "The Rural Church as a Vitalizing Agent,"⁴⁸ he stressed the need for the churches in rural communities to band together promoting the community rather than their own separate institutions.

This idealism was to be practiced from the pulpit and in the life of the minister and minister's family. The preacher should inspire country folk to adopt progressive methods of farming, willingness to sacrifice for larger purposes, and desire for community development. The Bible study classes should be places where the social, economic and political problems of the rural community can be addressed under the guidance of Biblical ideals. Earp in his book The Rural Church Movement provides an exhaustive list of topics the rural minister should be acquainted with and able to teach or coordinate the teachers including,

...immigration and farm labor, race antagonism and social cleavage in country life; problems of land tenure, size of farms, intensive agriculture, conservation of rural resources, the rural church and the rural school.⁴⁹

The church should be a forum where "the social issues of the day" could be debated with informed and passionate leadership.

Such idealism should also be used to improve the self-esteem of country people by showing the "rural-mindedness" of

48 Swanson, 369.

49 Earp, 128.

Jesus and the whole Bible. Earp even goes so far as to suggest that the minister can stimulate the farmers to get rid of their animal and crop pests by making the parallel to "pests" of the soul: just as the latter has been plagued by the Fall but can be renewed to its "normal" image by Jesus, so, too, Nature's pests can be eradicated and returned to its normal image through remedies provided by the state and national Agricultural Departments.

The minister, besides promoting these new agricultural techniques, must also be able to speak the language of the new cash economy in the countryside. The profits of speculative agriculture can help prosper both the rural community and church, alleges Warren Wilson.

Depleted soils are being restored, and although a period of poverty and struggle will be necessary in restoring them, their future is one of great wealth, and permanent tillage of these soils under scientific management promises cumulative gains. Cooperation among farmers is seen to be profitable....Already many have realized great gains. The consecration of this prosperity is the immediate task of the country Church [emphasis added]. 50

At the present, Wilson asserts, the migration of rural people off the farm appears to be robbing the rural institutions of their constituency. However, in reality, the readjustment in agriculture will produce a healthier and more progressive rural community. With their new prosperity they in turn will "magnify the church" which--along with the school--will always be a necessary institution. The church--with its resulting

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Wilson, Church of the Open, 151.

beautiful buildings and improved leadership--will then be even more powerful and able to affect the idealism of the rural people.

The "survey" method was one of the most popular strategies to improve country life. It was believed that people were not applying themselves to the problems because of lack of adequate information. Survey workers are compared to the "princes" of Numbers 13:2 who are sent out to spy on the Promised Land by making a survey of its crops and people. Once the leaders saw the needs of the people then they could show them a better way.

One of the needs which was discovered and which the churches rapidly sought to fill was the lack of community. Churches were turned into social centers where people could gather for entertainment, learning, community decisions, and moral growth. Social and fellowship halls, including kitchens, begin to show up in some of the larger rural parishes.

Summary

Several scholars have been rather harsh in their assessment of the Country Life Movement. Swanson concludes,

While the churches were among the first and most vigorous institutions to respond to the National Commission on Country Life's call, they failed to implement fully a country life program of community development. Also, they were the first of the institutions to curtail their interest in the country life movement. 51

He blames their rather limited success on an inability to be

ecumenical, preferring instead to choose to strengthen their own denomination. What Swanson's evaluation ignores is the originality of the churches' efforts in the context of thousands of years of rural degradation. Also, he underestimates the impact which country life leaders had on later rural renewal projects.

William Bowers' negative critique is based on his predisposition for economic analysis. He points out that the country lifers did not realize the awesome power for transformation unleashed by the industrial revolution:

In fact, the movement actually contributed to it by urging modern farm equipment and creature comforts on country people....Reformers...played a role enlarging the farm population's acceptance of the material products of the city by stressing that they were a means to keep progressive young people and others on the farm. 52

In other words, by adapting a value considered important by the urban population the rural culture had to assume the same path toward industrial efficiency. In so doing, the very young people they were trying to save were lost because they were no longer needed. Another example is that the emphasis upon the church as a promoter of community required large cash contributions to build new facilities. In turn, this goal encouraged the promotion of cash cropping. Also, he maintains that the very improvements--such as telephones, cars, roads--reduced the need for the church to act as the social community center.

Bowers also cites the unwillingness of most rural people

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Bowers, 130.

to abandon the security of the "old time religion" for a more socially active faith. Many of them were reluctant to care about "non-spiritual" issues like sociological studies, stewardship theology, or breakdown of the community. Similar to many people who lack control over their destinies, the farm people were glad to have the church transport them "out of the world."

A final criticism, given by Bowers, is that these reformers relied too heavily on education: "Plainly, education could not cause people to stay on the farm when economic forces were bidding them to go."⁵³ Ironically, he blames this on their own advancement through education from humble rural backgrounds.

However, I believe Bowers underestimates the creativity of these reformers within an institution such as the church. Much of their theology of the creation was innovative and is still a resource for theologians. Liberty Hyde Bailey's works have been rediscovered in the ecological movement of the seventies. The "face-to-face" communitarianism which had worked so well for Social Gospellers in the cities was an obvious tool for rural renewal. That the rural culture was considered a separate organism worthy of study by caring Christians was a major step forward. The next case study which will be examined was spawned by a man who grew up in an area where rural Christians were attempting to bring some life back to their country.

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Bowers, 133.

Second Case Study: Arthur Holt and the Merom
Institute of Chicago Theological Seminary

Background

The Rev. Dr. Arthur Holt founded the Merom Institute as a "country-life center" on the grounds of the old Union Christian College at Merom, Indiana, in 1936. In doing so, he was not only revitalizing a defunct college; also he was seeking to regenerate a decaying rural culture. His Christian faith, intellect and concern for rural life had been with him since childhood. Growing up in a devout Presbyterian home near Longmont, Colorado, Arthur Holt was deeply influenced by his father, Asa Holt. Asa had been one of the first Grange members and had migrated to Colorado in 1871 with the Horace Greeley colony.⁵⁴ Though Holt left the farm and entered ministry and academia, the experience of working with this colony affected him all his life. He was deeply sensitive to the plight of rural America and sought to recreate the spirit of cooperation he had experienced as an adolescent.

The purpose of the Institute was to influence the church to participate in the renewal of the rural culture in America. As stated in its charter, its goals were to

... conserve for America and the Christian religion the native values of rural life; vitalize and socialize the religious culture of a region; place intelligence and inspiration at the disposal of the people who intended to live in rural neighborhoods; immerse itself in the stream of rural life and be an observation, listening and service post as

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Jacob H. Dorn, "The Rural Ideal and Agrarian Realities: Arthur E. Holt and the Vision of a Decentralized America in the Inter-War Years," Church History 52 (March 1983) : 53.

America went through the great industrial and urban-rural change brought about by its ability to manufacture and use machinery; and try to keep alive the principles of self-help in a democracy.

Merom Institute Charter, 1936 55

Holt's vision included the need for an educational institution which bridged the chasm of urban and rural lifestyles, conserved the rapidly dwindling rural values, and helped to revitalize the land, spirit and politics of rural people.

In both his tenure as secretary of the Congregational Social Service Commission and as Professor of Social Ethics at Chicago Theological Seminary, Holt sought to communicate to the larger church the importance of rural concerns. Both institutions prior to his activity had a largely urban-industrial focus so his influence was novel.⁵⁶

The Problem

The Dust Bowl and Great Depression had a profound impact throughout American society. At the turn of the century, as noted above, many voices were beginning to question the American infatuation with individualism. After a resurgence of self-autonomy after World War I, the Depression and Dust Bowl came as a shocking shower of cold water. Arthur Holt began to suggest that agriculture and rural communities suffered from an excess of individualism. Specifically his attack was directed at the idol of private ownership when it was unhindered

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Arthur C. McGiffert, Jr. No Ivory Tower (Chicago: Chicago Theological Seminary, 1965), 194.

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Dorn, 54.

by social concerns.

Holt was willing to support other attempts to rectify the "agricultural problem" such as conservation of the soil with the plea "the soil is sacred."⁵⁷ However, he did not believe this "problem" was essentially soil-related. Rather, he claims that it was the excessive drive for private gain and quick profits which was the chief disease of rural culture. Such sickness could be found in both the land developer and the farmer. Holt argued,

The agricultural problem is not only a problem of the soil; it is a problem of law and it is a problem of social theory and ethics. In other words, it is a great human problem. 58

It was not a stewardship ethic which was missing but one for social utility. The exploitation of the human and natural resources in the rural sector was due to the short-sighted, individualistic ethics derived from a "survival of the fittest" worldview.

As with many other persons raised in the country who then took jobs in the city, Arthur Holt was dismayed at the lack of community the city displayed. People in the city did not share trust, concern, or "neighborliness."

The process of urbanization had also caused subconscious antipathies by the city dweller for his/her rural compatriot according to Holt. Part of this prejudice he believed was built into the economic fabric of the urban-rural interchange.

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Arthur E. Holt, "America's Real Farm Issue," Christian Century 53 (19 February 1936): 290.

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Holt, "America's," 290.

One of the ways this took place was the "cheap food" policies. Holt believed that he could change this policy by his writing in such journals as the Christian Century.

Urban people want cheap food! Naturally. But they dare not demand it at the cost of destroying the agricultural base of society. 59

He saw the middlemen and urban laborers who were demanding higher wages as one of the chief obstacles to a rural democracy. They wanted cheap food, not realizing their own handling costs were responsible for the majority of the price. Holt sees the irony when both the businessperson and laborer castigate the farmer for doing what they do so professionally: withhold their product to drive the price up.

Another problem, closely connected to cheap food policies, was the financing of farming in America. Holt describes "urbanization" in financial terms:

[it] is the way in which that part of our population who live in cities think and act in their capacity as lenders of money. They want what they call "sound money," which means that debt-paying is an unqualified obligation.60

Holt begins to question the method by which one sector--the farmers--gets itself into such great debt to the urbanite; similarly, how it is that the urbanite has all the power to manipulate the currency by which that debt will be repaid. He demands that "something must be done to insure for the farmer

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Arthur E. Holt, "Urban People Want Cheap Food," Christian Century 49 (22 June 1932): 803.

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Arthur E. Holt, This Nation Under God (Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1939), 53.

that the debt he contracts will be the debt he pays."⁶¹

Another problem which Holt perceived was the lack of "moral energy" commensurate with the complexity of modern life. He describes the dilemma faced by the modern Christian as,

He clings, in theory, to the ideas of responsibility and common welfare. But he is unable to act upon that ethic for he has developed moral energy for organizing only a small phase of life. Modern political and economic energy, however, equipped with science, has given him a world which extends beyond the borders of his city and of his nation, and is organized on the theory of the survival of the fittest.⁶²

To deal with this dilemma American Christians have taken three roads. The first Holt calls the inner life, the second, the rationalists, and the third the Social Gospel.

The first path subverted this moral energy by steering a path for otherworldliness, observes Holt. Progress along this path was measured by finding relief for the inner crises of the heart through divine intervention. It emphasizes evangelism and the second coming of Christ. Its end result was that it "shot religion into the sky."⁶³

The second path--rationalism--also destroys the foundations for a community religion. It does this, according to Holt, by combining the "doctrines of human rights and of the

⁶¹ Holt, "Urban People," 803.

⁶² Holt, This Nation, 54.

⁶³ Holt, This Nation, 54-55.

divine right of property."⁶⁴ Holt believes the rationalists set forth the materialist manifesto with great wealth as the holy shrine. Holt saw the results of such a philosophy as evident in World War I and the Great Depression. These were the shoals on which individualism was shipwrecked.

The third road was that of the Social Gospel. Desiring to "reconstitute the American dream in terms of a social order which had railroad trains and factories but retained the spirit of the community and its sense of personal relationship,"⁶⁵ Holt believed their greatest mistake was that they underestimated the density of "the jungle of a whole civilization built around the principles of survival of the fittest and the struggle for power."⁶⁶ The gospel of Channing, Parker and Bushnell was still valuable but it needed to be reconstituted for the long haul.

Theology

Studying with Gerald Birney Smith at the Chicago Theological School it followed that Holt was influenced by the Social Gospel. He was considered one of the founders of Congregational Social Action, especially in its organizational forms:

C. Howard Hopkins, pioneering historian of the Social Gospel, ranked him with Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, and Graham Taylor as "the creative leaders" in Congregationalist social ministry.⁶⁷

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Holt, This Nation, 55.

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Holt, This Nation, 55.

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Holt, This Nation, 55.

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Jacob Dorn, "A History of Congregational Social Action," Social Action 8 (15 May 1942):39.

In such a highly influential position, though, Holt never composed a theological justification for his social involvement. It is difficult to decipher from his many books and articles. Once, when describing the techniques of good fishing he suggested,

It is an instinctive attitude in which reason plays a smaller part than countless pleasurable experiences in the past. 68

Similarly, his theology could be summarized as "instinctive" rather than rational. He insisted that the role of the church consisted of the shaping of values but not through reason as much as community. "Fellowship is the process by which mind meets mind in a realm which is real to persons." 69 It is the duty of the minister to be a "mind-builder."

As part of the Social Gospel tradition, Holt believed Jesus did not so much start a dogmatic system as set before the community of believers a set of ideals. Central to these ideals was the theme of social justice: that humans treat each other fairly. According to Holt, Jesus presented his followers with a plan for the redemption of society which,

... looked forward to the creation of brotherly men who loved justice enough to be willing to give it in thought as well as in deed, and to give it even sacrificially, where the reward to be had was reaped by those who come after rather than by those who

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Arthur E. Holt, Social Work in the Churches (Philadelphia: Reformed Church in the U.S., 1922), 3.

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Holt, Social Work, 4.

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who gave justice.

One of the primary purposes of Jesus' ministry and that of his followers was, consequently, to make permanent community possible. Social justice was the prerequisite for thriving community life.

Theological ideals, religious experience and practice all had to be integrated. "Man's nature demands unity."⁷¹ This integration also involved sociological analysis:

Our religion since its beginning has always been influenced by the natural associations of men in tribes, home life, cities, nations, and industrial relationships. From the tribe it gained the conception of God, the Father, and also its first interpretations of brotherhood. From the kingship it learned the idea of a kingdom of God and a Prince of Peace. From the city came the idea of the Holy City of God let down upon the earth. From the Roman Empire it gained a concept of universality and of world-wide citizenship. The early associations in commerce and business gave new meaning and value to honesty.⁷²

Sociological configurations have a determinative impact on theology. It is, therefore, the task of the church in the modern era to understand its peculiar social phenomenon of industrialism in order to re-think its theology.

This new industrial order has created new groups and communities. These are defined as: "open country," "rural industrial," "village," "town," "college community," "resort community," and "city: suburban, industrial, down-town, and residential." These new groups force the reinterpretation of

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Holt, Social Work, 4.

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Holt, Social Work, 5.

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Holt, Social Work, 6.

what it means to build the kingdom of God on earth. Fighting against such a reinterpretation are the organized mental attitudes of modern industrialism:

For ours is not a conflict with mere flesh and blood but with the despotisms, the empires and the forces that control and govern this dark world--the spiritual host of evil arrayed against us in the heavenly warfare.⁷³

Holt does not question the creation of such groups but that they have been taught to relate on the "natural" basis of conflict and competition. There is no community or communication between them. Thus, "only a sense of Reality which stands over against the natural world, and which is of such infinite value that it makes the lesser goals of human striving seem small in comparison, will dispel the fevers which annoy the souls of modern men."⁷⁴

So, Holt's theology of the creation and rural life was founded on the prophetic call to create community. This could only be accomplished when there was justice. This justice he defined as "right relationships":

The builders of the new order will seek as their main concern in life the righteousness of God, confident that the other privileges and necessities of life can be secured by a social order which has paid the price of a right attitude between man and man. A world now facing starvation because of the disruption, through war, of the forces of production and the channels of trade may well heed Jesus' thought that the maintaining of right relationships among men is the key to the solution of the problem of

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Holt, Social Work, 3.

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Holt, Social Work, 8.

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food and drink.

Unfortunately, Holt did not go into much further detail in defining "right relationships" but he does intuit that it must happen between social groups as well as between individuals.

Strategies

In his position at Chicago Theological Seminary, Holt's solution for both the rural and urban crisis was sought in the creation of "communities of responsible living." Rediscovering a sense of community, modeled on the old village, but articulated in the terms of modern life, would start modern society back on the path of social justice. Holt believed that all individuals needed to be nourished in "face-to-face" relationships in order to guarantee an inner motivation for responsible lifestyles. The family and small village provided this context in the past and it is the role of the church to provide it in the future.

As one of the most charismatic members of the Chicago faculty he fostered a communication between the theoretical and practical departments. This was a necessity for educating ministerial students who were not defenders or builders of tradition but who were skilled religious social engineers. He warned that,

...so long as we leave this prestige in the hands of the historical disciplines, religion will continue to be classified with archaeology, and theological students will know why farmers and villagers staged a revolt in 1000 B.C. but they

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Thomas Alfred Tripp, "The Theology of Arthur E. Holt," Town and Country Church, no. 95 (February 1954): 4.

will be totally oblivious to the rural-urban conflict in 1928. 76

Students had to be prepared to be able to analyse their present context of ministry as well as to know the traditions.

The best method for such analysis was that borrowed from the social sciences. Holt started a course titled "Social and Religious Research and Survey."⁷⁷ Specifically for rural students, Holt started rural studies; so much so that McGiffert says the seminary became "bifocal," an extraordinary phenomenon for an inner city seminary. Students who would be entering rural ministry should do so with a different set of values and tactics. "They should be equipped to bring to their task the enrichment of the best in rural poetry, drama, fiction and the arts."⁷⁸

An example of this "bifocal" posture was the way Holt introduced rural-urban relationships into Biblical studies at the Seminary. For instance, he taught that,

The oldest conflict in the world is the conflict between the city and the hinterland. It is written all through the Old Testament that Hebrew justice was pounded out on the anvil of this struggle. Justice to the poor meant justice to the villager and the villager was the man who did the farming. Most of the achievements of Solomon had back of them conscript labor and a standing army organized to a large extent at the expense of a depressed rural class....The peasants' revolt against Rehoboam was a revolt over taxes.... 79

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McGiffert, No Ivory Tower, 197.

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McGiffert, No Ivory Tower, 187.

78

McGiffert, No Ivory Tower, 193.

79

Holt, This Nation, 87.

Holt continues by pointing out that the modern city has the chance to be not just a "consuming city" but one which provides the country with useful items in a fair and equitable interchange. The urban consumer must get over the belief that he or she has a divine right to cheap food. He concludes by asserting that "the city has what the country needs and the country has what the city needs."⁸⁰

As noted above, one of Holt's other strategies to bring about rural renewal was to found the Merom Institute. Renovating a college campus near Terre Haute, Indiana, Holt sought to create a

Christian thought center...[which would] conserve rural values, "vitalize and socialize" religion, provide reasons for people to stay in rural areas, work for "a distributed rather than a centralized America," and foster self-help. 81

Through a series of institutes Merom sought to provide an educational program which would improve rural life. Holt organized it without a president, classes or settled student body. He believed that the academic and administrative ethos of Merom ought to reflect the informal structure and personalism of rural life. Thus, he hoped that future rural ministers would gain an appreciation for rural forms of communication.

For Holt, Merom was never intended to be a rural theological school. It was to be an "exposure" for students to rural culture and a "listening post" for an urban seminary and church. The Rev. Shirley Green, one of the Directors of the

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Holt, This Nation, 88.

81 Dorn, "The Rural Ideal," 64.

Merom Institute, when asked why he chose to leave the city and participate in the training of rural church workers responded by citing four reasons: (1) The rural community feeds the world. (2) It is the seedbed of population. (3) It is a place of refuge when the urban going gets tough. (4) It is the native home of idealism.⁸² Holt did not hope so much to convert the church to a rural ideology as to have its leaders experience the very life which he had known growing up in Colorado.

Dorn believes that Merom failed in its goal to be a "Christian thought center for a new America."⁸³ Principally this was because,

...in spite of his realistic social research and the concreteness of much of his thought, it was not a new America that Holt sought but rather the restoration of an older America that was rapidly disappearing--if it had ever existed.⁸⁴

Summary

The image that Arthur Holt often used for himself was that of the Old Testament rural prophet speaking out against the selfishness, arrogance and ignorance of the city. Even one of his greatest admirers, McGiffert, winced at this "anti-urban animus": "...He gave his students the impression that he hated the city."⁸⁵ Yet, as a prophet, Holt was not fearful

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Town and Country Church, no. 17 (April 1945): 1.

83

Dorn, "The Rural Ideal," 65.

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Dorn, "The Rural Ideal," 65.

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Jacob H. Dorn, "Religion and Reform in the City: The 'Re-Thinking Chicago' Movement of the 1930s," Church History 55, no. 3 (September 1986): 337.

of confrontation with the industrial powers in Chicago and was instrumental in changing the course of an institution. He did not wish to turn back time and go "back to the land" as much as "root for the underdog." He desired to raise the level of respect for, economic wealth of, and spiritual service to rural culture. He hoped that the rural renewal movement would become as strong as the labor movement in demanding justice⁸⁶ and fair recompense for farmers.

As was evident in much of the Country Life reformers, it seems that one of Holt's principal concerns was the reproduction in modern industrial society of the community life of the old rural town. He believed sincerely that this was necessary both for the survival of democracy and the church. It was only in such a community that people could act responsibly without compulsion or fear. He hoped that the rural towns and churches would take the lead in advocating and modeling this lifestyle for the rest of the nation.

Holt has been criticized for being part of the liberal movement which places too much confidence "in reason, good will, and information as instruments of change toward a better future."⁸⁷ Dorn notes that Reinhold Niebuhr's critique of the liberal efforts are applicable to some of Holt's methods:

Reading between the lines, one suspects that the leaders and planners emphasized meetings, discus-

⁸⁶ McGiffert, No Ivory Tower, 193.

⁸⁷ Dorn, "Religion and Reform," 335.

sion and publications not so much because they were necessary preliminary steps toward action, as because they believed these efforts had an inherent salutary effect in themselves. Education, mutual understanding, and good feelings (were) means Niebuhr deemed inadequate to the ends of peace and justice. 88

However, Holt did have a very pragmatic side. Dorn goes on to say that, "Holt's analysis of the needs of American farmers, though marked by strains of idealism, had a striking quality of realism about the power relationships among social groups." ⁸⁹ His books and articles for the Christian Century display no lack of pragmatic suggestions. Sometimes, those who are critical of idealism are the very ones who are being asked to change by the idealist. Holt, for one, could not be accused of having excluded himself or his thinking "from relevance to ⁹⁰ the ordinary stubborn facts of daily life."

Rather, primary criticism of Holt should be centered on his inability to connect his scientific pragmatism, on the one hand, and his philosophical idealism on the other. He deeply sought unity of experience, and integration of thought and practice, but was unwilling to develop an adequate metaphysics which incorporated the very evils he was so much against. In short, in the face of the rapid decay of the rural culture and

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Dorn, "Religion and Reform," 335. Dorn is writing here about Holt's participation in the "Re-Thinking Chicago" movement but I believe it can also be applied to the rural renewal movement.

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Dorn, "Religion and Reform," 335.

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Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality, eds. D.R. Griffin and D.W. Sherburne, corrected ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978), xiii.

landscape which he dearly loved, Holt found himself split between the urban and the rural worlds. He acted as a voice crying out in the wilderness of the urban jungle. Yet, this voice was merely repeating the very ideals which were being drowned by the flood tide of urban industrialism.

Holt, though, refused to retreat to a mere individualistic idealism in the face of this flood tide. His call to create community was not an appeal for the creation of a separated group which maintained right relationships. He was keenly aware of the need to incorporate economics, sociology and other disciplines into the search for new corporate attitudes.

While not clearly articulated, there seems to be an assumption that the "natural world" operates on the basis of conflict. Thus, one must experience a conversion--an experience of a separate reality which he calls the "righteousness of God"--before being able to participate in a social order based on cooperation. Once accomplished, the converted will instinctively choose to sacrifice his or her own interests for those of the present and future communities.

This conflict he believed to be at the root of the rural-urban relationship. It was "natural" for the urban people to want cheap food from the country. It was inevitable for the urbanite to desire control over the land. His solution though was to highlight the effects of such domination and to plan an institution such as Merom where urban people could experience the problems and joys of country life.

Third Case Study: Peter Maurin
and the Catholic Worker Farms

Thought in Peter Maurin's view, was primary. It was the idea which, if it were to prevail, must do so because of its final reasonableness and with its truth so exemplified in personalist lives that it required neither force nor emotional appeal to sustain it.⁹¹

Background

It is necessary to understand Peter Maurin's attempt at rural renewal in the context of the entire Catholic Worker Movement as well as the social context of the American Catholic Church.

When the the Catholic Worker newspaper was first published in 1933 near Union Square in New York City, its title was hotly debated. The two publishers, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, disagreed on the last word. Day wanted "worker" while Maurin wanted "agronomist." It was this division between her desire to represent the urban proletariat and his demand for agricultural transformation which characterized the multicultural dimension of this innovative journal.

This division was also displayed in the apparent diversity of purposes declared by the Catholic Worker. The three basic goals of this movement were: Round-table discussions between workers and intellectuals, Houses of Hospitality, and agronomic universities. It is this last function which will be reviewed most closely here. Yet, it must be kept in mind that

Dorothy Day
1982), 127.

91

William D. Miller, Dorothy Day: A Biography (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 127.

Maurin, at least, saw these three goals as closely intertwined. It was his belief that the agricultural problems led to the urban problems and therefore deserved the primary focus of attention.

The social groupings which made up the Catholic church in America were quite different than its European counterpart. Whereas the latter was governed and financed by the aristocratic and intellectual elite, the former was largely supported by first and second generation immigrants--most of whom had been forced off family farms, or were part of the industrial proletariat. Its priests were often drawn from these poorer classes as well. Thus, a certain pragmatism pervades its response to rural degradation.

Throughout this examination it will be obvious that there was a very pragmatic function of these agronomic universities --the Catholic Worker farms. Having said this, though, the reader must always keep in mind that, as the above quotation indicates, Peter Maurin was interested in nothing less than a rational reinterpretation of the meaning of human life. Steeped in the socialist literature of his day, and the economic problems dramatized by the Depression, he concentrated his efforts on spawning a "green revolution" in people's minds. The enduring success of these universities mattered little compared to the purity of this central vision. This vision he believed would live on regardless of the practical results.

Another consideration which undergirded the founding of

the farms was the relationship between religion and social change. For Maurin theology had largely obscured the simple meanings of the Gospels and it was his mission to reintroduce them. For him living out the Gospel was synonymous with a commitment to tolerance, openness and personal sacrifice for others. The final results of such practice were in God's hands. The believer had only to practice them.

The first worker farm was established in Easton, Pennsylvania, on a donated 28-acre parcel in 1936. Criticized by some readers that the Worker was fleeing from urban problems, Maurin fired back commentary on the importance of resettling unemployed families, and testing communal lifestyles for families. Because of the close contact the inner city Catholic Worker mission had with unemployed, Maurin knew that many of them were recent refugees from the farm. The urban problem was closely connected to the rural problem. Therefore, he believed the Easton farm was not so much a "retreat" as an advancement into the core of modern industrial society's principal problem: the unsustainability of its rural life.

The families who moved to Easton farmed both individual and communal plots. They were also expected to operate a guest house to provide relaxation for the urban workers. This guest house would also be used by the missions as a halfway house for urban alcoholics and dispirited unemployed. By World War II this model had been reduplicated in about twelve other sites. In each case, the combination of farming, intellectual activity and "works of mercy" was maintained.

Many of the Catholic Worker farms suffered a great loss of energy when the war deprived them of their volunteers and the unemployed. Most of the farms, in fact, had failed by the end of World War II. Yet some were maintained into the 1960s⁹² when they experienced a revival of interest.

The Catholic Worker also enjoyed close contact and affiliation with the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. One of the central concerns of this group of priests and lay people was the effect of industrialism on the Catholic family. As one Archbishop pronounced in 1937,

The burning concern of the Catholic Church with agriculture arises from the altogether unique relationship which exists universally between the agricultural occupation and the central institution of the Christian, nay of all, civilization, the family....The farm is the native habitat of the family. Industrial society works against the family and in favor of divorce, desertion, temporary unions, companionate marriage; agricultural society is characterized by the strength, permanence, and unity of the marriage bond....the farm family is the most important source of population growth.⁹³

Though Maurin himself was single and many of the people who spent time at Worker farms were not married, still, this essentially pragmatic approach to the rural problem was found in both approaches to rural renewal made by the Catholic Church. Maurin and the leaders of the NCRLC communicated and

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Ironically, one of the more sustainable examples of the Catholic Worker farms was not even started as one: the Koinonia Farms in Georgia. Though started under the auspices of a Baptist minister, Clarence Jordan, the Catholic Worker became a great supporter of it. It modeled the original goals better than most of the ones the Worker actually started.

93

John La Farge, "Agriculture and Vocation," The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 34 (September 1938):1-2.

spoke at each other's conferences and retreat houses.

The Problem

Having grown up in France, Maurin had been profoundly influenced by the French commune system. Whereas Marx had based his analysis of haves and have-nots on the revolution of 1848 in Paris, Maurin decided that the really important socio-economic factor was not the conflict over wealth but the conflict over land. His ideal was not the Paris Commune but the ninety successful and peaceful communes in the French countryside. These concentrated on small-scale ownership, crafts and farming rather than mass production. He described the modern problem as lack of recognition of other paths than industrialism.

We are in a new dark age caused by an industrialism which doesn't know where it is going. Those who should have the light, particularly the Irish, cannot give leadership, for they no longer have the knowledge. They are no longer interested in scholarship. They cannot tell how we got into the mess and so they cannot show the way out. A few Irish can, but most of them are too busy trying to keep up with the Anglo-Saxons in money-making. The old Christian values are being replaced by Benjamin Franklin's mottoes: "Your dollar's your best friend. Business is business. A penny saved is a penny earned. Cash and carry."⁹⁴

The problem, then, was not a loose gear in the cogs of industrialism, but industrialism itself. It had created a society of people who valued money over learning and cooperation. The purpose of the society was now to make acquisitive consumers rather than functional givers.

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Arthur Sheehan, Peter Maurin: Gay Believer (Garden City, N.J.: Hanover House, 1959), 13.

The rural refugees fleeing to America's cities were perceived by Maurin as misguided by their exchange--voluntarily or forced--of land for business. Deeply influenced by Peter Kropotkin's Mutual Aid, Maurin believed that the general populace had been duped to believe that Nature operated on a "survival of the fittest" model. In reality, as Kropotkin's research indicated, the majority of nature operated on the principle of community rather than competition and violence. Peasants and farmers had been taught to believe they were being weeded out by a more fit economic system based on large-scale efficiency. They had been told it was "natural" for them to be displaced and migrate to the city. Maurin believed that what was "natural" was for the humans to live closely to the land and to cooperate with one another.

Closely related to the problem of detachment from the land was the modern devaluation of manual labor. Maurin viewed the obsession with machine invention as a principal cause of this devaluation. He would assent to the evaluation of Pius IX: "... as raw materials went into the factory and came out ennobled and man went in and came out degraded."⁹⁵ Such degradation also led to division between the scholars and the workers. The scholars treated the laborers as another commodity which could be bought and sold. In turn, the scholars had become so specialized that they knew more and more about less

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Dorothy Day, By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day, ed. Robert Ellsberg (New York: Knopf, 1983), 126.

and less. Thus, they were ridiculed by the working classes as being unable to function in the real world.

Theology

Our business managers
 have made such a mess of things
 that people are inclined to see red.
 And when people see red it is useless
 to present to them the red, white and blue.
 because they can no longer see
 the white and blue
 of the red, white and blue;
 all they can see is red.
 The only way
 to keep people from seeing red
 is to make them see green.
 The only way
 to prevent a red revolution
 is to promote a green revolution.⁹⁶

Given the insistence of Maurin that education and action should be based on philosophy and theology, it is surprising how difficult it has been to decipher his own particular brand of these from his writings. On the one hand, it would be easy to consign Maurin to a non-intellectual "Francis of Assisi" type. However, this does not do justice either to his professed longing for intellectual rationalization nor for the ultimate impact on the lives and ministries with which he was associated.⁹⁷ Rather, the difficulty of deciphering his theology should be attributed to Maurin's dislike for theological terminology because of its baffling of the common per-

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Peter Maurin, Easy Essays (West Hamlin, W.Va.: Catholic Worker Farm, 1974), 25.

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Maurin was said to have left the Sillon movement in France because of its distrust of academic pursuits. William Miller, A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement (New York: Liveright, 1973), 26-28.

98
son. He chose rather to communicate with everyday language, believing it was rich with hidden theology.

The Thomistic Doctrine of the Common Good provided the basis for much of Maurin's perception of reality. Then enjoying a renaissance in Europe with the likes of Hillaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, and Etienne Gilson, Aquinas' thinking pervades much of Maurin's works. The common good had priority over private interests because of its divine origination. Aquinas writes,

Everything is therefore called good from the divine goodness, as from the first exemplary effective and final principle of all goodness.⁹⁹

Modern catholic thought had tried to form a middle stand between laissez-faire capitalism and state socialism. Pius XI insists that "public institutions of the nations must be such as to make the whole of human society conform to the common good, i.e. to the standard of social justice."¹⁰⁰ Thus, little individualism is found in Maurin's worldview.

Maurin believed deeply in the central vision that cult, culture and agriculture were integrally intertwined. When he titled one of his essays "Back to Christ--Back to the Land"¹⁰¹

98
Sheehan, 185.

99
Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, 6.4

100
"Common Good," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967.

101
Maurin, 28.

this was no simple romanticism. It was his deeply held belief that the structure of a society and its beliefs had a direct impact on each other. In order to have community one must have land and Christ; in order to have Christ one must have land and community; in order to have land one must have community and Christ. It was only in this type of a non-bourgeois, non-mechanistic environment that one could have an organic and familial philosophy of life. It was only when members of a community were of one mind spiritually that they could be ordered and caring from within the individual rather than from without the community by force.

Both communism and capitalism Maurin denounces for their concern to emphasize the organization of the material world.

The Bolshevist Socialist
is the spiritual son of the bourgeois capitalist;
both believe in getting all they can get
and not in giving all they can give. 102

Both, in Maurin's thinking, eliminated spiritual values as they sought to create a materialistic paradise.

Another influential factor upon Maurin's theology was what came to be called Personalistic Idealism. One example is the poem,

To give and not to take,
that is what makes man human.
To serve and not to rule,
that is what makes man human.
To help and not to crush,
that is what makes man human.

.....
 Ideals and not deals,
 that is what makes man human.103

The importance of values over ideology was basic to Maurin's thinking. He believed that the human being was motivated by ideals rather than ideas. By force of the will a human could choose a good value over a bad value, which such distinction was arrived at through force of reason and common sense. He believed modern thought--not nature--had taught humans to be "go-getters" and they could just as easily be taught to be "go-givers." Education and religion were intertwined in the process of teaching humans the correct ideals and inspiring them to choose and act upon them.

As a result, the "green revolution" could be spawned by rhetoric and action on a personal level. If individuals could be convinced of the validity of giving, they would do it. Once this process was set in motion it would pick up momentum and everyone would join in. Day recalls this personalistic philosophy,

Peter's plan was that groups should borrow from mutual-aid credit unions in the parish to start ...agronomic universities....Or he wanted people to give the land and money. He always spoke of giving. Those who had land and tools should give. Those who had capital should give. Those who had labor should give that.104

When people argued that such a philosophy was attractive but not practical, Maurin would retort that "it hasn't been

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Maurin, 37.

104

Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1952), 225.

105
 tried."

Strategies

Neither Peter Maurin nor Dorothy Day wrote a manifesto or strategic plan for their movement. Yet, much has been recorded in the development of the "worker farms" and also in their newspaper. It is from these sources that an outline of their strategies can be gleaned.

Two tactics which Maurin believed were linked and could save the rural sector were: a return to subsistence farming and assumption of voluntary poverty. Essentially, this is a return to a peasant life he had experienced in France. He quotes from Oliver Goldsmith to support the primacy of a healthy peasantry:

Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey
 Where wealth accumulates and men decay:
 Princes and lords may flourish or may fade;
 A breath can make them, as a breath hath made:
 But a bold peasantry, a country's pride,
 When once destroy'd, can never be supplied.106

Subsistence and poverty were the the two values which made up the foundation of the Catholic Worker Farms, or as Maurin called them, "farming communes" or "agronomic universities." They were designed on the model of subsistence farming within the context of a village and craft industry. It is by no accident that E.F. Schumacher's works were first published in America in the Catholic Worker. Indeed, Maurin was writing

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Sheehan, Peter Maurin, 13.

106

A quotation of Oliver Goldsmith found in
 Sheehan, 14.

"small is beautiful" forty years before it became the title of a book.

All the negative aspects of the industrial and market system could be circumvented by restructuring society around the model of the subsistence farm. Rather than trying to make the industrial system more just, he believed it could be replaced by communes which did not feed the state nor the industrial system but rather themselves. Such is the memory of Day, reflecting upon her experience at the Easton farm,

"Eat what you raise and raise what you eat" meant that you ate the things indigenous to the New York climate, such as tomatoes, not oranges; honey, not sugar, etc.¹⁰⁷

This philosophy caused no small amount of dissension at the Easton worker farm. According to Dorothy Day,

...the people who came to them, the poor, had no experience at all with eating food that they could grow....Those at the farm would "take their pennies" down to Easton where they bought whiskey and packaged foods. It would take a long time, Dorothy thought, for people to overcome their addiction to money and its capacity to produce the immediate gratification of junk food.¹⁰⁸

Yet, many of the guests who came to the farms for shorter periods of time were inspired by the simple life and closeness to the land.

One of the techniques which Maurin encouraged on the worker farms was biodynamic gardening. He wrote glamorously of the truck gardeners he knew around Paris who produced hundreds of tons of vegetables from small acreages. Lord

¹⁰⁷

Day, The Long Loneliness, 227.

¹⁰⁸

Miller, 295.

Albert Howard's book The Agricultural Testament was required reading for Maurin's farm workers. It taught them to fertilize and control pests without the use of industrial chemicals.

Since much of the problem of rural life was perceived by Maurin as the dissolution of community life, then it stood to reason that one of the solutions was the recreation of new forms of it. Reflecting in her autobiography Day writes,

Community--that was the social answer to the long loneliness. That was one of the attractions of religious life and why couldn't lay people share in it? Not just the basic community of the family, but also a community of families, with a combination of private and communal property. This could be a farming commune, a continuation of the agronomic university Peter spoke of ... "But not a five-year plan," he would say. He did not believe in blueprints or a planned economy. Things grow organically. 109

Peter believed the urban existence was hostile to community because it made so many people feel useless. On the farm people with every skill were important, as well as the elderly and children. Farm work provided them with regular exercise, a chance to imitate their parents, develop reflective powers through observation of nature and be nourished by the healthy food, air and water.

Not only was industrialism responsible for the dissolution of community but it had also demeaned work. Maurin believed that a new philosophy of work had to be articulated and practiced in order for his vision of healthy rural communities to be implemented. He began with the notion that God was a

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Day, The Long Loneliness, 224.

worker, a Creator in making the world. The humans are co-creators when they participate in responsible actions such as child-rearing, food-production, and making provision for clothing and housing. He distinguished between the nervous fatigue and boring drudgery of most factory and agricultural jobs, and the joyous creativity of small-scale crafts and subsistence farming. "Work, not wages" meant, for Maurin, that humans had an instinctive need for good, responsible work. Humans, according to Maurin, could not live on bread alone but also on good labor. The ideal place for such good, responsible, productive labor was the farming commune. No one there ever had reason to be unemployed.

By its very nature, this type of joyous work meant that there would be no "bosses." He took seriously for the workplace Jesus' admonition, "Call no man master, for all ye are brothers." This strategy also had some rather trying results for the communities of the worker farms. Those who came to the farms were "boss-minded and job-minded." They lacked the ability to perceive the chores which needed to be done and the initiative to carry them out on their own. As Day reminisces,

The more people there were around, the less got done. Some cooked, washed dishes, carpentered, worked in the garden and tended the animals. But none worked hard enough. No one worked as I have seen sisters and brothers in monasteries work.¹¹⁰

For Maurin work should not be separated from art. The artist was the responsible workman and vice versa. He deplored the division of artists into artistic communities which produced

¹¹⁰ Miller, Dorothy Day, 294.

nothing useful and, in turn, factory hands who produced nothing amusing nor with responsibility. He cites "Ruskin's statement that the great ages of Greek and medieval art had come out of the handicrafts and that no revival of art was possible without the cultivation of handicrafts."¹¹¹ Such manual crafts not only promoted art but also education. Maurin, with Kropotkin, believed that the best education was "hands on." That is, hand to eye to brain education. He believed that many of the world's great scientists and thinkers had arrived at their breakthroughs through contact with the creation--in their gardens, fashioning their instruments or walking through nature.

As a result of his attitudes about work, Maurin often came into conflict with Dorothy Day's continued efforts to unionize workers. Maurin believed that "work was a gift not a commodity,"¹¹² and thus respect for it should be obtained by discussion rather than confrontation.

Summary

In many ways, the Catholic Worker Farms were a Catholic parallel of the Merom Institute. One of the major differences, though, was that they were not merely educationally oriented but, also, practically living out the vision being espoused. Peter Maurin was as much opposed to individualism, selfishness and industrialism's breakdown of community life as Holt. Like the latter, Maurin was a philosophical idealist, preferring to

¹¹¹ Sheehan, 71.

¹¹² Miller, 304.

proclaim the efficacy of certain ideals over others.

Maurin's "green revolution" bears startling resemblance to recent "back to the land" and "green" movements, as well as previous utopian experiments in the middle of the nineteenth century. An historian of the Catholic Worker movement, Mel Piehl, has proposed that,

...the Catholic Worker therefore be considered not primarily as a movement for social change, but as a movement of utopian dissent. They typically express their disaffection with the larger society not through direct social action but through attempts to criticize the values of that society, often by creating enclaves that are expected to serve as alternative social models. This impulse was clearly present in the Catholic Worker's ...farms, which incorporated many of the themes prevalent in American utopian experiments: personal freedom and dignity, economic communism, social equality, an emphasis on non-material values, smaller-scale social relations, and closer relations with nature."¹¹³

Like these other experiments, and similar to Holt, Maurin is unable to incorporate the modern powers of individualism, science and technology, and highly organized nation-states and companies, into his worldview. For Maurin these are "demonic" powers. As a result, his program for rural renewal is short-lived and scattered, however admirable.

A fourth case study will now be studied. It is the only one of these four which exhibits some awareness of the larger historical context and its indebtedness to previous efforts.

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Mel Piehl, Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1982), 242.

Fourth Case Study: Town and Country Movement

Background

The last case study is a little more broad and ill-defined in scope but acquires depth by its ecumenicity and the importance of its times. It encompasses the time from the early thirties to the early sixties of the twentieth century. Although several rural study centers spun off from some of its programming, the Town and Country Movement was primarily represented by three new periodical publications. These were the Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, the Town and Country Church, and the United Methodist Rural Fellowship Bulletin.

A revival of interest in the more social dimensions of the rural church began with the Dust Bowl and economic collapse of the Great Depression. A Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin was started in 1934 under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches. This bulletin consisted of papers on various issues related to rural ministry. Its main intention was,

To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad.¹¹⁴

The majority of its issues were concerned with revitalizing the church, analysing the role of the church in the rural community, and improving the quality of training for rural ministers. Yet, several topics which also received attention were erosion, roots of rural poverty, the loss of family

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Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 1 (April 1934): 1.

farms, increasing tenancy, the importance of land for Christian theology and the value of stewardship of soil. After several years its stated goal changed to the following:

To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: Toward a Christian Rural Civilization. 115

This new purpose reflected an even greater concern to involve the church in understanding its role as an agent in rural renewal.

Another journal--Town and Country Church--also could be considered an heir of the Country Life Movement. 116 This new journal represented 25 interdenominational religious bodies. Its aim was "to help put the worker in the small community into touch with numerous activities and programs being carried on by churches in all parts of the country." 117 Its purposes broadened quickly to include:

1. To encourage cooperation among rural churches.
2. To improve the administration of the local church,

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Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 27-2 (December 1937): 1.

116

Merwin Swanson, however, says the later movement is so significantly different that the two should be separated: the country life, he says sought a broad community development program whereas the Town and Country Movement was more centered on specific denominational improvement. Swanson, "The 'Country Life Movement,'" 373.

117

Town and Country Church, no. 1 (December 1943): 1.

this to include organization of the church, finance, religious education, community relationships, and the training of lay leadership.

3. To stimulate the development of a Christian philosophy of rural life, this to embrace ethical issues in agriculture, social reconstruction, and government programs; and the content of the minister's message.¹¹⁸

More than any other rural church journal, the Town and Country Church sought to be inclusive ecumenically, theologically and practically. Article authors represent 25 Protestant denominations as well as much coverage of the Catholic Rural Life Conference. It also reported on International Rural Life Conferences. Reprints of many of the more famous rural renewal authors are found periodically through its issues. Also, an occasional historical study of the development of the Rural Church movement can be found. Its diversity of goals is borne out in the eclectic arrangement of each issue--which includes reports of conferences and studies, book reviews, theological and historical studies by scholars, sermons from ministers and worship tools. Notably absent is the sociological surveys which are so prevalent in much of the Country Life Movement.

One of the groups this latter journal lent its support to was the Kirkridge Retreat Center. Modeled on the ministry of the Iona Community of Scotland, a group of ministers in 1944 purchased a 350-acre farm in the Delaware Water Gap of the Pocono Mountains. They were seeking to stimulate seminarians and clergy to undertake "unconventional" ministries, especially in urban slums and rural parishes. Their belief was that

¹¹⁸

Town and Country Church, no. 34 (April 1937): 1.

the two main problems were "failure of passion and failure of mutual support."¹¹⁹ What the rural areas needed was not so much "surveys and studies and strategies, as inflamed men, ready with their lives for difficult assignments in this country."¹²⁰ They called themselves the "hungry men," eager "to explore and share a newly prophetic, social-minded, Spirit-filled ministry." Though seeking to avoid any sense of a crystallized order or holier-than-thou attitude, they did resemble certain monastic traits of combining manual work, disciplines of corporate silence, intellectual study and discussion, and worship on their farm.

Two other journals which grew up after the Depression were both primarily related to the Methodist Church: the Methodist Rural Fellowship Bulletin (MRFB) and the Rural Church. As the journal of the Methodist Rural Fellowship, the former's goal was to "further Methodism's part in Christianizing rural life."¹²¹ Very little in the way of theology is published in it. It is more of a news journal seeking to keep isolated rural ministers in touch with one another. Like The Rural Church journal published out of Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, it did very little analysis--sociological, theological, historical--of the roots of rural problems, or the search for solutions to them. Professor Rockwell Smith was the editor

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Town and Country Church, no. 3 (February 1944): 4.

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Town and Country Church, no. 3 (February 1944): 4.

¹²¹

United Methodist Rural Fellowship Bulletin 19, no. 4 (December 1984): 1.

of The Rural Church and a regular contributor of the MRFB. The Rural Church stopped publication with the retirement of Professor Smith in the early 1970s. The MRFB almost closed down in the mid-1960s but succeeded in maintaining enough interest to continue down to the present and is even gaining in readership as interest in the rural crisis reawakens.

Problem

The problem as it was defined by the Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin was centered around the lack of a rural philosophy of life (nos. 27-3,67,95). All the values, media coverage, mechanization, and urbanization were causing an overshadowing of rural values (no.95). Few organizations, publications and government agencies were perceived as speaking on behalf of the rural sector. Ownership of land by non-farmers was a plague to rural life (nos. 27-2,68,73). Family inheritance was not being guaranteed as the Levitical laws mandated, but were actually subverted by government and speculators (no.71). Urban populations had forgotten that all life originates with the land, and that many of their leaders--business, church, political--were born and bred on the land (nos.46,86,89). Humans have impoverished their soils and there was little sense of trusteeship for the future (nos.45,74). Rural churches for too long assumed their role was to save souls out of a sinful world, which often removed the best citizens out of politics and community programs (no.62). Rural people are biological rather than "humane" and there is no "religion of the trees and beasts" which accomodates them (no.7). Ignorance of the "call to worship in the voice of

nature" was considered to be part of the problem (no. 36).

This comprehensive list was matched in the Town and Country Church journal. It, too, recognized a lack of a "Christian philosophy of rural life" (no.136). Contract farming and vertical integration are noted for the first time as culprits in destruction of the farmer's prosperity (no.132). Also discussed as problems were inefficient farmers (no.132), lack of theological imperatives separate from agrarian sentimentalism (no.130)¹²²; the lack of a conservation vision based on the Christian religion (nos.85,102); lack of a theological vision of stewardship (nos. 13,53,54, 70); lack of moral and ascetical discipline to check human misuse of scientific discoveries (no.52); the loss of leadership by the rural church to the liquor and movie interests (no.45); and loss of manual work and consequent mental health (no.41).

Often in these journals there is a reference to "the rural problem," "the farm crisis," "the country life problem," or "the plight of the rural church" with little definition about what that problem actually is. This is especially true of both the MRFB and The Rural Church. The question, "How can my church, with its own special situation, provide the best

122

In an article by Wesley A. Hotchkiss, "The Christian Faith and Modern Agriculture," Town and Country Church, no. 130 (January 1958): 2, considers that part of the problem of rural culture has been an overly sentimental image of itself; "So long as the rural church movement has a theology based upon the redemptive qualities of new mown hay it is neither expressing the ancient faith nor is it speaking realistically to the modern rural man."

possible ministry to the people it seeks to serve?"¹²³ captures the general assessment of the "problem" in these publications. In other words, their primary concern is to empower individual ministers in individual situations to take their own initiative to understand the problems which face their own congregation. Until the early 1980s, there was only one article in the MRFB which looked at some of the broader economic, technological and political dimensions of the "rural crisis." This was an article written by Shirley Greene, formerly director of the Merom Institute. He cites as causes of the "crisis" the revolution of technology and the loss of political power by emigration to urban areas. Interestingly, a part of his analysis is that the real problem in rural culture is not the technology or the emigration but that the people did not emigrate quickly enough away from inefficient farms.

The migration of farm people to cities was never fast enough to keep up with the mounting productivity of technologized agriculture.¹²⁴

Instead of moving off the farms quickly to make them more efficient, farmers stayed on the land, thus producing surpluses which, in turn, drove down the price of food.¹²⁵

Theology

Not once in these many publications is reference made to any major theologian or philosopher in church history for sup-

¹²³

United Methodist Rural Fellowship Bulletin 41, no. 1 (March 1981): 12.

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Shirley Greene, "Crisis - Rural and Urban," United Methodist Rural Fellowship Bulletin 26, no. 2 (June 1969): 1.

¹²⁵

A book published about this time seems to agree with this analysis: Edward Higbee, Farms and Farmers in an Urban

port or solution of the "rural problem."¹²⁶ Even in their many appeals to develop a "rural Christian philosophy" there is little evidence of research into the past or present theological tradition. Recognizing this dearth of historical-theological context, it is important to note that many of the writers did make reference to Biblical authority. There is some reference to Biblical prophets, Levitical laws and Christ's rural teachings.

Much of the theological debate about rural renewal in the Town and Country Movement then is founded on Biblical exegesis, rural values and experience. Four major themes can be deduced from many of the writings: stewardship, the "rural philosophy" of the Bible, agricultural ethics and foundation of the family.

Stewardship. Much of the theological appeal is based on the verse "The earth is the Lord's." Many attempts are made to

Age (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1963), 3, 101, 103, 85. For Higbee the problem in rural areas is illusory: for the top 3 percent who are producing 78 per cent of the food, life was never so good on the farm; they "are living higher on the hog." Citing a Committee for Economic Development report--chaired by the finance committee of the Ford Motor Co.--Higbee writes, "Excess resources in use in the production of farm goods is the farm problem." His conclusion is that, "Unquestionably American agriculture would be more efficient if two million inefficient farmers were to drop out of the picture." The "farm problem" is caused by overly sentimental farmers wanting to hold onto the homestead when it should go the way of "Mom and Pop shopkeeping."

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A short biography of Walter Rauschenbusch was given in Benson Y. Landis, "Great Prophet of Social Gospel," Town and Country Church, no. 124 (April 1957): 11, but, then, only to note his contribution to the importance of cooperation-- "...cooperative organizations are a remarkable demonstration of the society-making power of love."

understand the meaning of God's ownership of creation and the role the humans play as its stewards. Many appeals are made on the basis that the way we treat the topsoil is the way we treat God. In a published sermon, "Religion and Your Top Soil," the Rev. Owen E. Osborne warns that,

If your farming has been simply for self--for what gain you could pull out of the soil, with little heed to preserving its rich qualities to pass on to another generation--I don't suggest that you give up farming simply because you have not shown respect for God's gift. I suggest that you turn your talents to "farming for the glory of God!"¹²⁷

A large group of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant town and country leaders signed a statement of principles including the following propositions:

God created the world, of which the earth is a portion, with a purpose, and through his loving Providence He maintains the world for the good of the human beings. Therefore, all human beings possess a direct natural right to have access to created natural resources.

God's intention in creation is to enable man to live with dignity in accord with his noble nature and destiny, to develop his personality, to establish a family and to be a useful member of a society. Society exists to fulfill these aims.

The land is God's greatest material gift to mankind. It is a fundamental source of food, fiber, and fuel. The right to use such elemental source of life and development is essential for human welfare....

Land is a very special kind of property. Ownership of land does not give an absolute right to use or abuse, nor is it devoid of social responsibilities. It is in fact a stewardship...the land steward has a duty to enrich the soil he tills and to hand it down to future generations as a thank offering to God, the giver, and as a loving inheritance to his children's children.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ "Soil Saving and Farm Ownership," Town and Country Church, no. 14 (January 1945): 4.

¹²⁸ "Man's Relation to the Land," Town and Country Church, no. 19 (September 1945): 1.

High value has been attached to the land. Yet, it remains an object, a present, which has been given over to deserving subjects, that is, the humans. There is an unselfconscious anthropocentricity about such statements. Another example of this kind of stewardship is from the "Basic Factors for Creative Rural Living." Aaron Rapking notes that,

As God planned the universe He had a purpose in mind--the development of personality by living and working with others and God in achieving the "kingdom of God". The message of the Bible makes it clear that in the mind of God as revealed through Christ, personality is of the greatest value....the universe was designed to aid in developing these capacities. 129

In other words, it is the actualization of a well-developed human personality which is the major goal of the universe. To achieve this goal it is necessary to act as a partner and co-creator with God in the preservation of the five basic creative processes of life: natural resources, family life, religion, education and relationships.

Time and again, in the Town & Country Journal and the Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, the Christian farmer is called upon to take on the role of a steward. This role is identified by the following:

The basic principle of stewardship is that God, through eternal ages, owns and controls the earth and all things upon and within it; that, within God's eternity, any given man moves upon the earthly scene and takes into his hand for only a brief time a very small amount of what God owns, has owned and will continue to own; and that man "possesses" it only as a temporary caretaker or as an associate with God: it is a "loan" from God to be faithfully used by man for the highest good, and to be

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Aaron H. Rapking, "Basic Factors for Creative Rural Living," Town and Country Church, no. 34 (April 1947): 1.

returned intact, and, if possible, augmented, to the Owner.¹³⁰

One of the favorite parables of Jesus in "stewardship" sermons was the parable of the talents. The farmer takes the capital which has been loaned and multiplies the investment ten, fifty, and even one hundred fold.

Often, though, more profound meanings of the term were explored than its connotations of capitalism and tithing. Ministers were encouraged to preach stewardship sermons which would exalt the virtues of good stewardship and decry the sins of mining the soil; after one such sermon a farmer remarked, "I'll never see another gully without thinking someone has committed a great sin."¹³¹

Rural Philosophy and Theology. A second theological theme is the search for a specific "rural theology"; that is, Biblical foundations for the maintenance of a healthy and just, rural culture. Underlying this search is the fear that the wave of urbanization could cause the extinction of rural culture. Such a rural theology was not to be built at the expense of the city but rather in relationship with it. An¹³²

¹³⁰ W.W. Reid, "What is Stewardship?" Town and Country Church, no. 34 (April 1947): 15.

¹³¹

W.O. Lambeth, "The Earth is the Lord's and the Fulness Thereof," Town and Country Church, no. 70 (April 1951): 3. See also no.80: 6; no.83: 6; no.102: 4. The anthropocentricity of such statements as found in the "Creed of the Soil Conservationist" should not be surprising given the era: "I believe God created the earth by his divine processes for the benefit of man, not one man, nor one generation, but mankind for all time," no. 100 (October 1954): 14.

¹³²

Occasionally some of the articles in these journals will bemoan the unhealthy life of the city but usually as a way of citing the strengths of the country, not to condemn the city as a Gomorrah.

example of this rural-urban context for theology is provided by Aaron Rapking,

Men have been saying that God made the country and man made the city. That statement is misleading and that philosophy is one of the main reasons for the trend toward secularizing all of life--which means to live as though God has no relationship to the ongoing natural processes, and man no responsibility as a partner of God. Man cannot build the city without God nor can man grow crops without God.... The future of our civilization and the civilization of the world will be determined largely by our attitudes toward God in directing the processes by which the natural resources become available in meeting man's physical need. Man acts either as a parasite or as a partner of God.¹³³

Human-centered thinking dominates this statement yet there is an attempt to overcome the bifurcated understanding of rural and urban life.

Many references are made to the fact that Biblical people are primarily rural. Their life is not glamorized but it is considered significant that rural lives draw important attention. Some of the writers recognize and counsel against such glamorization of rural culture. One of the perils is conceived to be "nature worship." Another is the enjoyment of the fruits of the land without living with justice and righteousness. A third peril is the connection between the land and nationalism: worshipping the Fatherland was as destructive as worshipping Mother Earth. A rural philosophy of life, according to Walter Harrelson, must avoid these three perilous

133 Rapking, "Basic Factors," 3.

shoals upon which Biblical and other peoples have become shipwrecked.

Having taken notice of this warning, however, the rural philosophers gathered together as much Biblical evidence as possible to support the stand that most of its writers were "country people," living close to nature, out-of-doors, and mostly farmers. Thus, rural people can more easily understand its language than scholars. One especially interesting note is that country people were thought to be able to hear the voices of nature--the heavens declaring the glory of God--more readily than the urban Christian. Supposedly, they were better able to avoid the pitfalls of nature worship because of their close contact with it.¹³⁴ Part of this rural philosophy is that life in the country and on the farm is a genuine aid to personal religion.¹³⁵

In "We need a Rural Philosophy," The Rev. Ralph Williamson, president of the Methodist Rural Fellowship, notes the Biblical roots of a rural philosophy.

Jesus had a philosophy of rural life. He was the Christ of the countryside. True He was, and is, the universal Christ, the savior of all mankind, yet in a peculiar sense he belongs to us. This becomes more clear when we contrast him with St. Paul. Somehow in those mysterious ways of God which are past finding out, while the first great exponent of our Christian faith was a city man, its Founder was a rural Person....Jesus' illustrations were drawn

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William L. Rogers, "The Country and God," Town and Country Church, no. 104 (February 1955): 13.

135

Edward K. Ziegler, "A Christian Rural Life Philosophy," The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no.6 (December 1941): 1-8.

almost entirely from the life of the village and countryside.¹³⁶

Before World War II, several articles praising natural theology and its rural roots were included in these journals. The General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren, The Rev. Charles D. Bonsack, wrote "Nature Speaks of God" to convey the many ways that the processes of Nature contain significant theological revelation. The symbol of sacrifice, for example, is seen in the farmer sowing seed into the ground. Also, patient love is signified by the way nature responds to careful attention: "A bit of gentleness to the cow will increase the flow of milk."¹³⁷ Nature even teaches the doctrine of redemption in its ability to regenerate broken or ruptured tissues, and the increase of fertility in the soil through death.

One of the more novel essays along this line of natural theology was that of Warren H. Wilson, the Presbyterian Country-Life leader, who wrote "The Faith Man Shares With Beast and Tree." In this writing Wilson asserts that it is not just the trees and flowers which proclaim the glory of God but also the brute creatures. Humans share intelligence, life, death and cunning with the beasts and fowl, and even, perhaps, a yearning for God. Wilson believes that just as Jesus chas-

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Ralph L. Williamson, "We Need a Rural Philosophy," Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 95 (September 1944): 1.

137

Charles D. Bonsack, "Nature Speaks of God," The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 36 (November 1938): 4.

tised the Jews for being exclusive of the claim of God's love for them, that Christians, today, need to expand their view of the "chosen people" to include the "chosen plants and animals." So, too, the Greeks ostracized the "barbarians," the early Christians the "heathen," and even the Indians called themselves the chosen ones over against other tribes. According to Wilson,

...just so it has been our custom to speak of the other species as "brutes." By this term we have put them out of divine consideration, away from the right to mercy, which children of God claim.¹³⁸

Wilson even dares to claim "panpsychism" for all other creation, citing Bergson and Lyman. Equality of the creation for the farmer is founded on the experience they have with other animals, "they know they share a common life, they know that all breed alike, feed alike and that all species alike shall die and feed the hungers off other 'earthborn companions.'"

One of the more ironic dualisms which is maintained in

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Warren H. Wilson, "The Faith Man Shares With Beast and Tree," Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 7 (December 1935):4. Wilson had worked for 30 years in Presbyterian projects for rural renewal before realizing this need for an ecological theology: "In our efforts to save and develop the country churches in America we feel ourselves baffled; and in the extension of equal gospel privileges to the rural peoples on foreign fields we have made only a hesitant beginning. We are repeating the history of past times; for Sorokin and Zimmerman say in their chapter on 'Rural-Urban Religious Culture,'--'We know that Christianity originated in the city and spread [to the country]....The class which resisted it most bitterly, which was last turned to Christianity, was the class of peasantry....The most stubborn resistance to Christianity comes from the country people'"(p.1). Wilson then makes the thesis that rural renewal will never happen until theology incorporates the beasts, trees and lilies of the field.

many of these new attempts to reformulate a philosophy of rural life is the juxtaposition of praise for the marvelous new "multiplication" of modern scientific farming while yet bemoaning the rampant materialism of modern society. It is conceived as a "good" that farm output has grown, so that fewer and fewer people are needed to produce food, thus freeing up more and more people for "the production and development of other desirable goods and services."¹³⁹ At the same time, these observers seem to be unaware that the materialism which they are constantly harping against as eating away at the religious and moral fiber of the nation might be an end result of that self-same process.

Another curiosity in several of these new rural philosophies is the portrayal of the wonder of human domination over the non-human creation. Paul Johnson suggests that capitalistic, industrial agriculture is so beneficial precisely on this point.

It concerns itself with multiplication, not with division, as do the socialistic ideologies. It raises the challenge of man against resources, not man against man. It is based on the notion that man acquires material wealth by developing the resources of the earth, not by stealing from other men. Through the development of resources there is wealth for all, not just for a few.¹⁴⁰

It is this ability to dominate in fact which is forcing the

¹³⁹ Paul C. Johnson, "Wanted....An Up-to-date Philosophy For Rural Life," Town and Country Church, no. 136 (October 1958): 6.

¹⁴⁰

Johnson, "Wanted....," 6.

reformulation of a new rural philosophy for a modern setting. As the Arcadian vision praised being in the country but not of it, the Bailey version had "one foot in the country, one foot in the city," so now in the 40s and 50s the rural philosophy resembles a suburban mentality.

Catholic authors sought to relate an agrarian philosophy to a philosophy of personalism. Rural values were to be promoted because they allowed the individual person--who is a spiritual being with an immortal soul--to achieve maximum fulfillment. Such was the standard of the editor of America, The Rev. John La Farge, S.J., when laying the framework for a rural philosophy.

I shall be interested in farming as a way of life precisely in order to enable persons to achieve their destiny, not because it is for the good, per se, of society, still less of the nation or state. If marshes are drained, it is for people to live upon them, not in order to raise grain for Solomon's chariot horses or to supply warriors for Belshazzar.¹⁴¹

The economic and physical resource problems of agriculture were basically questions of morals. These moral problems had their solutions in moral principles and redefinitions of the human being.

Agricultural Ethics. Thirdly, the town and country movement began to ask significant questions about agricultural ethics. Does the Christian faith have anything to say about the actual practice of agriculture? One way to do this was to acknowledge that farming was a sacred calling. The Bishop of

141

John LaFarge, "Agriculture as a Way of Life," The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 27-2 (December 1937):2.

Chichester was cited as an example of this when he said,

....the nation as a whole must be awake to the importance of the land; the countryman must sow and reap, dig and plough, in fellowship with God....¹⁴²

In both the Town and Country Church and Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin are printed Walter Lowdermilk's "Eleventh Commandment,"¹⁴³ bringing the practice of agriculture on an ethical par with the Decalogue.

For the first time considerations other than pure economics were introduced into the "efficiency equation." The Statement of Principles of "Man's Relation to Land" contains the following:

Efficiency in land is not to be judged merely by material production but by a balanced consideration of the spiritual, social and material values that redound therefrom to person, family and society. The land is not to be a source of benefit to a favored few and a means of servile labor to the many.¹⁴⁴

In an article entitled "Theology and Agriculture," Rev. Kenneth Prior argues that theology must be taught in agricultural schools and agriculture in theology schools. His reasons

¹⁴²

"The Rusty Links," Town and Country Church, no.19 (Sept. 1945):8.

¹⁴³

TCRFB, no. 74 (1942 September) and Town and Country Church, no. 13 (1944 December): 5. "Thou shalt inherit the earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect thy hills from overgrazing from thy herds, that thy descendents may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land thy fruitful fields shall become sterile stony ground and wasting gullies, and thy descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or perish from off the face of the earth."

¹⁴⁴

"Man's Relation to the Land," Town and Country Church, no.19 (September 1945): 1.

are that,

The only significant religion is one which starts where man is, and with the facts and the problems of that concrete situation, and goes with man whatever he does and whatever he meets.¹⁴⁵

After arguing that agriculture is that vocation which is one of the most profound attachments humans have with the environment and therefore deserving of theological reflection, he then argues that the practice of agriculture affects one's religion,

Because conduct is a function of environment, good husbandry, which is one mode of man's dealing with environment, is entirely and unavoidably religious, and is as much a positive moral obligation as is the precept to love our neighbor....therefore the exploitation or spoilation of soil or stock of any means whatsoever are sins against our neighbor, our posterity, against the natural order, and against God whose it all is, and whose instruments and agents we are for its right use.¹⁴⁶

On the other hand, he asserts that one cannot understand much of the Bible, and is unequipped to minister in a rural area without a foundation in the principles of good stewardship. He concludes by saying that modern agriculture and theology have torn asunder what God put together by not communicating with each other to the detriment of both.

There is the recognition of an interrelationship between the environment and human health - spiritual and physical. Vladimir Hartman exhorts,

Man has taken from the earth without replacing. He has

¹⁴⁵

Kenneth Prior, "Theology and Agriculture," Town and Country Church, no. 53 (May 1949): 10.

¹⁴⁶

Prior, "Theology and Agriculture," 10.

failed to see this relationship between soil erosion and soul erosion and has thus victimized himself by disregarding the relationship between God, man and the land.¹⁴⁷

The soil is seen as both the source of physical life and spiritual life. If it is eroded so, too, will crumble the foundations of school, church and home.

Foundation of Family. Fourthly, in the Town and Country Movement, the theological discussion of community life was narrowed from the village-context to the family. For instance, it was thought, rural lifestyles (i.e.importance of family, closeness to creation, frugality, hard work, neighborliness, honesty, and responsibility of ownership) led to strong families which led to strong churches which, in turn, made for strong cities and civilizations.¹⁴⁸ The unity and loyalty required in farming promotes cooperation and commitment in the religious life.¹⁴⁹ The Catholic writers especially focused attention on the family. Agricultural methods themselves were to be judged on their impact on the community of the family. "...the court of first and last resort is the family, not the individual preference nor the organized group."¹⁵⁰

147

Vladimir E. Hartman, "The Rural Church and Its Opportunity of Service," Town and Country Church, no. 89 (May 1953): 10.

148

Paul C. Johnson, "The Greatest Need in Rural Life Today," Town and Country Church, no. 147 (December 1959): 5.

149

Mark A. Dawber, "Agriculture as a Way of Life," Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, no. 27-3 (December 1937): 1-4.

150

LaFarge, "Agriculture as a Way of Life," 2.

Summary

As the massive tragedies of the Dust Bowl became apparent to the Church, theologians began to emphasize this "stewardship" theme to its churches. Mark Dawber laments the loss of reverence for the land in the churches. Citing the recent scientific findings of the Soil Conservation Service and Walter Lowdermilk outlining historical soil loss, he claims that we have "sinned against God's holy earth through ignorance,¹⁵¹ selfishness and greed." He proposes that each country church inscribe in gold letters on its building the words, "To save the land is to save the people."¹⁵² It is the responsibility of the church "to keep before its people the sacred trust that is involved in the stewardship of the soil."¹⁵³ If stewardship is to be taken seriously then farming must be redefined as a "way of life" rather than a commercial venture.

Thus, in the thirty years of theological reflection since the country life movement, a profound change has happened. In the beginning theology blessed and sanctified the modern agricultural system as productive of a more progressive rural community. By 1937, though still agreeing that it was the proper place of the church to be "in the world," that same church began to take up a more defensive-prophetic posture against the dominant trends toward more chemicals, more mach-

¹⁵¹

Mark Dawber, Rebuilding Rural America (New York: Friendship, 1937), 33.

¹⁵²

Dawber, 36.

¹⁵³

Dawber, 37.

ines and fewer people.

Yet, by the decade of the fifties this defensive posture had changed to be one of resignation before the awesome forces of agricultural mechanization and production. By the sixties all that remained of a quest for rural renewal was a concern for hunger overseas. The primary theological task was to promote agricultural missions to lands where there was hunger and to modernize the rural churches with new facilities. By the time of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, church theologians had all but abandoned the tasks of reflecting upon the meaning and purpose of agriculture, and the responsibility of stewardship for the environment.

I now turn to a comparative analysis of these four projects, seeking to note the common issues involved. Also, I will attempt to glean enduring theological insights, problem analyses, and strategies which might assist those in the present who have an interest in rural renewal.

Some of this schizophrenic behaviour continued into the present. While lamenting the decline of the rural church and the rural community, church historian Rockwell Smith still adds his blessing to the on-going industrialization of agriculture, proclaiming that the future is bright: "[farmers will be]...fewer than ever before and incredibly more efficient in production and distribution. They will be technicians and specialists dealing expertly with single crops, taking full advantage of the latest mechanical inventions to utilize the most recent scientific discoveries. They will operate very large acreages very intensively; in this they will be aided and abetted by a corps of technical experts...." Rockwell Smith, Rural Ministry and the Changing Community (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 116.

CHAPTER 4

Comparative Analysis of Case Studies

It should be obvious by now that there has been much concern about the "rural problem" in the twentieth century. The four case studies which were examined in the previous chapter represent only four such attempts to bring attention of rural degradation before the churches, and to seek out a role for the Christian community in bringing about rural renewal. How well these projects succeeded in these efforts is difficult to gauge. However, it is the thesis of this writing project that historical reflection upon their analysis of the problem, theological constructs and strategies can be helpful for present-day rural renewal efforts. In so doing, we may also gain a larger perspective on the overall context of the "rural crisis" which can help us to delve beneath the immediate "crisis" circumstances and develop solutions which will truly be sustainable. Such historical reflection can also provide a more realistic understanding of the forces which prevent rural renewal.

Each case study has great diversity within itself.¹ Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the points of view and strategies which appear to be the most general and which have

¹ Throughout this chapter an abbreviation system will be used to designate each case study by letters: CLM--Country Life Movement; AH--Arthur Holt and the Merom Institute; CW--Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker Farms; TCM--Town and Country Movement.

parallels in some of the other cases. Then it is important to make some preliminary conclusions on the basis of these comparisons in relation to the present context.

Perceptions of "The Rural Problem"

More often than not, problem definition is not very well articulated in any of these programs. The best analogy of their approach to "the rural problem" is that of a bad odor in a room: many of the primary activists left the room--the rural culture-- in order to obtain an education. Upon returning into the room they smelled something rotten. Their search for that bad odor typifies their search for the "rural problem." They roam the rural landscape frantically seeking a culprit that can then be tossed out. The following are the most frequent and discernible causes of rural degradation expressed by these four projects:

1. First was thought to be the urban biases against farming and rural culture, including economic relationships (AH, CW, TCM). This is the belief that rural people are oppressed by the urban powers. The country person lacks the power to control his or her own destiny. They are puppets of bankers, land speculators, tax collectors, merchants, machine salespersons and middlemen. Beneath this analysis of the problem is the assumption that most rural folk are innocent, naive, simple folk who are taken advantage of by the fast-talking, worldly-wise, urbanite.

2. Another problem was thought to be the lack of qualified leadership in the schools and churches, including training in agriculture, sociology and rural values (CLM, TCM). Church

bureaucrats believed strongly in the power of education to effect change. It was thought that making the minister and teachers of country life well educated and sensitive to the needs of rural life could help to raise rural lifestyles to an enjoyable level. These rural leaders would inspire farmers and others to become modern, adapting the latest techniques in farming, management and financing.

3. Many thought the "rural problem" was simply a lack of cultural activities (CLM, CW, TCM). The problem with rural life was often defined as inadequate cultural opportunities. The brightest and most innovative youth were being syphoned off into the city, with the result that the farms and rural schools, businesses and churches were increasingly peopled with less ambitious and more dull personalities. This, in turn, it was thought, led to moral decay, adolescent delinquency, and unhappy spouses. General despair prevailed and there was little hope or vision for a better tomorrow in the countryside. People acquiesced to the changes, even though such change was often for the worst rather than positing imaginative alternatives.

4. Materialism, mechanization and "urbanitis" were destroying the moral, family and community life of the farm and town (CLM, CW). Ironically, though many of these projects expressed the problem of the lack of cultural activities, they also expressed discontent that what "culture" was available in rural areas was destructive of traditional rural values. It was felt that all the evils of urban life--from prostitution to materialism--were being cultivated in rural

life. Few cultural activities reinforced the traditional rural values of community life, thriftiness, moral uprightness, and the value of physical labor.

5. Erosion, deforestation and loss of soil fertility were slowly grinding away the principal resources needed for rural renewal (CLM, AH, TCM). Even George Washington had been aware of this problem. Yet, it took another century before the churches took an active awareness in resource degradation. The general disregard Americans seemed to display toward all natural resources shocked many of these rural activists. As before, most of the awareness of this problem was evidenced not by the farmers but by former "country boys" who had "made good" in the city. They conducted no comprehensive studies of this degradation as much as relied upon personal experience and anecdotes.

6. Another problem was the individualism and the lack of a "social ethic"--too much "otherworldly" religion (CLM, AH, TCM). It was believed that the ethic of Social Darwinism--survival of the "fittest"--had infested the rural ethos. Often this ethic is blamed for the cutthroat competitiveness of farmers and their inability to organize themselves. Writers bemoan the changing of the times from an ethic when neighbor helped neighbor to the new doctrine of self-aggrandizement. Neighborliness is lost. Even within families, each member goes his or her own way rather than helping out on the family farm. Sometimes blame is placed on personalistic religion which emphasized individual salvation. Critics pointed to the apathy toward rural degradation as a result of a religion which

taught that what happens in the physical world is meaningless.

7. Several considered the lack of ethical reflection on technology and industrialism to be a deficiency in the rural community (AH, CW). As the effects of industrialism impacted the farm and rural community, two of the projects made perceptive queries into the benefits of this path. Both Holt and Maurin suggested that machines and "efficiency decisions" could not be adopted without ethical consultations as to the ramifications upon the rural ecology and community. Holt, especially, believed that one of the biggest problems in rural life was that people were not being equipped with advanced ethical structures to match the incredible changes in science and technology. As a result, they were being overwhelmed with the "latest" inventions. They were not choosing their own destiny.

8. Devaluation of manual labor caused a disruption in the community spirit (CW, TCM). A large part of the social cohesion of rural families and communities in previous times had been built around the need for long hours of hard labor for many hands. This was true both within and without the home. Part of the problem with the modern farm was thought to be its devaluation of this physical labor. Ministers, teachers, machine salespersons, and the media were blamed for inculcating a love for leisure over against this previous work ethic. As a result, farmers were forced to rely more on capital--which they had no power to control--and view their neighbor's farm as the means to obtain the needed machinery.

9. Many thought there was a need for a Christian philoso-

phy of rural life (CLM, CW, TCM). This problem involved two aspects: on the one hand, that the church did not tailor its message to appeal to and support rural folk, and, on the other hand, that society as a whole did not have a metaphysic which made sense of the physical creation and the provision of physical needs. The former lack led to a lack of respect, pride and meaning in the rural way of life. The latter caused the land, animals, and rural folk to be exploited because they were outside the realm of ethics.

10. Modern techniques in farming were wanting (CLM, AH, TCM). Perhaps more than anything else, the perception of this factor as a problem is evidence for the general schizophrenia about "the rural problem." Quite often, pronouncements against the general "backwardness" of farmers were juxtaposed next to many of the above problems. Criticism of the rural communities' resistance to change was often paralleled by complaints about the loss of traditional rural values. There seemed to be an inability to analyse "the rural problem" in the complex context of change, civilization and ecological interconnectedness.

Notably lacking in any of these perceptions of the problem is any reflection upon whether farming itself might be the problem. In other words, there is no analysis of whether the same destruction process which was happening to rural culture was in any way connected to the rapid "transformation" which this same farming lifestyle had effected upon the hunting-gatherer culture.

Also, there was only one observer who found any problem

with the romanticization of rural life (p. 101, n. 118). No one seems to be aware that myths about rural life were part of "the rural problem" and hindering its resolution. This could be the reason there are so many assumptions made about "the rural problem" and so little search into its historical development.

Theological and Philosophical Foundations

One of the similarities in each of the case studies conducted in Chapter 3 has been the difficulty diagnosing the particular theology or philosophy which undergirds the problem analysis and strategies proffered. Some of this hesitancy to be more systematic can, I believe, be attributed to the powerful tradition of agrarian populism which pervades much of rural America. Some of the characteristics of this tradition have been defined as,

...virtue resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions....Populists stress a moral outlook rather than a definite program; they need leaders in mystical contact with the people, and expect these leaders to share the people's way of life. Populism is a movement rather than a party, anti-intellectual and with little precise ideology. It is antiestablishment, and arises among people who feel themselves outside the center of power; however, it does not encourage class war or glorify violence, and it is easily corrupted by success. It is sympathetic to small business, hostile to financiers,Often rural, it can also be urban, though it is religious, hostile to science and technology, and nostalgic for the past. 2

We have seen many of these factors and postures at work in the

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Margaret Canovan, Populism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 290.

case studies. The reluctance to present their ideology in a systematic fashion can be attributed to the distrust of rationalism present in this tradition.

However, given this reluctance, it is important not to dismiss their proposals as anti-intellectual. Rather, couched beneath the images and prophetic utterances are some definite--and often strikingly innovative--theological propositions. They are the following:

1. The earth is good and the world is the proper concern of the Christian faith (CLM, AH, CW, TCM).
2. There is an intimate connection between what happens to the soil, rural society, and the human soul; the creation is not bi-modal (CLM, CW, TCM).
3. The Bible has much to say concerning economic relationships, relationships to the land, and relationships between urban and rural (CLM, CW, TCM).
4. The churches ought to provide a "redemptive" vision of agriculture, and rural society (CLM, AH, TCM).
5. Jesus' mission was to restore community life--rural and urban--and this was best accomplished by social justice (CW, AH, TCM, CLM).
6. The Kingdom of God is founded on cooperation rather than individualistic competition (AH, CW, TCM).
7. The central metaphor for describing the Christian relationship to the environment is "steward" (CLM, CW, TCM).
8. Urban life is grudgingly accepted (sometimes tied to original sin) but it is the countryside which is the rightful dwelling place of God--even revelatory if only in an emotional sense (CLM, AH, CW, TCM).

Some of the singular theological perceptions were:

1. Peter Maurin's linking of social justice with agriculture and the Doctrine of the Common Good.
2. The blessing of modern technology as resulting in "progress" in the Country Life movement.

3. Warren Wilson's appeal for a theology which incorporates all the non-human creation.

Some of these theological assumptions and propositions are, indeed, dependent upon the populist tradition. Yet there are also some which are very creative and sincerely struggling to understand and bring meaning to rural life as it is and has been experienced by so many of the world's population.

It is remarkable, in fact, how very uniform much of their theology is without being dependent upon one theologian or school of thought. One of the most basic uniformities is the desire to bring their Biblical and theological musings to bear upon the whole of the created order. They all seem to sense the need for a more inclusive theology, one which incorporates some of the more mundane aspects of existence: work, land, food, and community. Another generalization can be made about their trust of Biblical and personal experiences over against appeals to theologians or logic.

Both of these theological motifs helped these rural leaders to care deeply for the pain and sufferings of the rural community. Whereas most of their peers were virtually ignorant of the plight of rural culture, these activists dedicated their lives to publicizing its problems and seeking solutions. How well their theologies aided in creating viable alternatives is difficult to evaluate. Before attempting such an evaluation it is first necessary to compare their strategies.

Comparisons of Strategies

Due to the choice of the case studies, one of the primary strategies used by all four projects is the power of the printed word. Either through pamphlets, books, journals or curriculums there is obvious reliance upon the efficacy of education. If enough individuals could be alerted to the problem and persuaded to adopt new values then a rural renaissance was in the offing.

Each project displayed every intention of remaining within its own church tradition. Yet, little theory or theology applicable to that tradition is used to propose solutions. Much of the force of conviction for change or action is derived from direct appeal to Biblical precedent or emotive experience of rural childhoods.

In spite of much of the "community" language in both the formulation of rural problems and theological reflection, much that pertains to the actual solutions in these programs is very individualistic. It is the individual minister who will "convert" the individual farmer to being a good steward, lure the isolated rural person to joining the community life of the church, and inspire the rural community to become progressive and proud of its heritage. This minister acted as the social scientist-technician of the rural community--carefully surveying its problems and resources then publicizing them and organizing efforts to correct them.

Modernization is highly encouraged by most ministers as a harbinger of more prosperous rural cultures. Bigger farms,

bigger equipment and more financial sophistication is supported by the country-lifers, Arthur Holt, and most Town and Country movers and shakers. Only the Catholic Workers and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference question it. Yet, all four case studies reveal a strong bias for privately-held family farms.

New institutions were developed both in the form of rural study centers, and rural fellowships. There were also many institutes and conferences to help unite, train and encourage rural ministers for confronting the changing rural community.

Efforts to resettle urban unemployed and new immigrants on the land were conducted by several of the groups. Most of the strategies were directed to urban elites, bureaucracies or well-educated ministers.

Many of these strategies had marginal success. For short periods of time they elicited the attention and support of urban sympathizers and church bureaucracies. They are to be commended for the first steps they took toward rural revitalization. However, many of their novel insights and good intentions were non-sustainable. In many ways, those who are pursuing these same goals in the decades of the seventies and eighties are starting from scratch because there was little continuity built into their problem analysis, ideology or strategies. They rested on will power alone--a few saints who would carry the standard while the masses of both rural and urban Christians were largely uninvolved. Idealism must be

harnessed with a powerful fuel source or it soon runs out of gas.

Preliminary Conclusions

These historical examples reveal that many of the same concerns that we have today have been prevalent for several generations. The leaders involved in these case studies were observant of the many factors involved in rural degradation and sought solutions from history, Biblical studies and practical experience.

There are several perspectives from which to articulate a criticism of them and their value for similar projects today. One could say that many of the solutions have already been tried and found lacking so that there is no hope; it is inevitable that humans as they become civilized will destroy their lands and rural cultures. Or one might cite the minor successes and seek to maximize them through social organization and legislative coercion. Another alternative would be to say that our context is radically different than theirs in that we now have twice the world population, the possibility to extinguish all life and have experienced some of the consequences of degradation; therefore, we need radically new solutions. A fourth approach is the one which follows in the rest of this project. This is the approach of synthesizing many of the above concerns into a new cosmology. It appears to me that cosmological metaphysics was not only rarely brought to bear on the question of rural degradation but also there was little analysis of the cosmology which so pervaded their own approaches to this issue. For earnest people who were so desper-

ately seeking a philosophy of rural life, they show an incredible ignorance of or apathy toward both the theological and philosophical traditions. One of the reasons for this neglect could have been the general demise of metaphysics after Immanuel Kant. However, even more glaring is their lack of critique or understanding of their relatedness to their American forebears such as the agrarians, transcendentalists or arcadians. Excluding Wesley Hotchkiss' critique of theology based on the redemptive quality of new mown hay, there seemed to be little reason to question the foundational assessment of rural life as it had been articulated by the romantic tradition.

It can be concluded from comparisons of these case studies with 19th century theological and sociological motifs of rural life that one of the greatest hindrances to the careful analysis and search for solutions to degenerating rural life was the romantic idealization of that country life. Such an idealistic picture prevented the questioning of the basic structure of agriculture, not to mention its industrialization process. This idealized version was expressed in the "simple" values of rural life, the health of the open air, the mothering source of all that was good about America (democracy, hard work, abundance, strong faith). This phenomenon paralleled the same romanticization of women vis-a-vis men, and America vis-a-vis Europe. Such romanticization prevented thorough reflection and self-critique. Rural America was being used and abused, all the while primping and preening and jesticulating

about its wondrous importance.

The country-lifers, Holtians, Catholic workers, and town and country reformers were burdened with this idyllic picture. In many ways they succumbed to it for the justification of their own projects. In other ways, they utilized it to enlist supporters of their cause by painting the image of what the country used to be as compared to what it had become. Some succeeded in going beyond it by looking at the relationship between the rise of civilizations and agricultural patterns. Very few, however, accomplished what they set out to do in establishing a "rural philosophy of life."

Need for a Christian Rural Metaphysic

What was evident in each of these case studies was the lack of a rational understanding of rural life. Unfortunately, they approached this need by reflecting on the mere products of rural life such as community relatedness, healthful bodies and morals, abundance of food, and committed spiritual life and work ethic. Their "rural philosophy" often resembled a reduplication effort of a lost or dying culture. There was faint effort to examine the roots of agriculture or to relate rural culture to the rapidly developing industrial-urban culture. In short, it is my contention that they did not realize that rural philosophy must be a part of a larger cosmology, one which encompasses the very process of life itself.

What is really meant by the word "cosmology" is the meaning and purpose of creation--terrology--combined with the meaning and purpose of human life--anthropology. Even if no such reflection takes place, the actions of the individual and

the structures of the society presume certain biases and assumptions about them. These questions have become increasingly difficult to answer as humans have embarked on "civilized" life. That is, the individual human has become detached from his/her environment through reliance upon agriculture, machines, roads, cities; yet, as a species, that relationship to creation is increasingly complicated and dependent. As a result, modern metaphysics has concerned itself with epistemology, language, logic and numbers to the detriment of consideration for the more physical dimensions of creation.

Without an adequate cosmology, apocalypticism has reared its ugly head again as a response to the existing and impending famines, and the degradation of rural culture and resources. A continuing response has been to place ourselves in the hands of the technology "saviour"--which it is assumed will come up with a way to produce food and fiber once all the land, water and farms have been mined. A more practical response has been to extend our resource tentacles out to other countries and appropriate their physical labor and resources. As these "solutions" have been critiqued in many other treatises I will not spend the time doing so here.

What should be clear, though, from this brief outline of theology and rural degradation is that profound worldviews or metaphysics underlie even the most mundane human ethical choices and values. Such hidden categorial schemes can successfully counteract even the most righteous and vocal

prophetic voices. Such presuppositions about the human place in the creation must be exposed and analysed before any sustainable change can take place. Such was the insight of Aldo Leopold,

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. 3

The same could be said about rural renewal: that philosophers and theologians have not done the hard-thinking necessary to come up with a comprehensive "rural philosophy/theology" is evidence that no important steps for rural renewal can happen.

Since 1934, when Leopold wrote this, there has been a tremendous increase of ecological consciousness. Indeed, a veritable conversion of our loyalties, affections and convictions is happening. Yet, with this heightened consciousness has come an increasing despair as we begin to realize the mess we have made. Not only must we become aware of our biases, but we must also surmount them.

The last two decades of heightened ecological consciousness has caused a renewal of interest in these questions. The very environment from which humans "escaped" is in danger of rapid decay. It has become increasingly clear that the entire biotic life process rests on tender and tenuous bonds. Also, it has become evident that the human species will not escape

3

Jackson, 92.

any such massive degradation of Nature--we are intimately linked to its future. Decisions about the direction of human civilization now may have apocalyptic results. As C. Dean Freudenberger has indicated, the combined pressures of soil and resource loss, and increasing population have never been so magnitudinous as in the present:

The pressure for survival increases relentlessly, causing humanity to expand onto more fragile land, which in turn causes further deforestation, irrigation with waterlogging and salinization, thinning soils from oxidization, wind and water erosion and the loss of existing croplands from oil shale and coal extraction and the spread of human settlements (urbanization) onto farmland. 4

No time must be lost in beginning the tough work of reformulating a rational anthropology and terrology in order to provide the foundation for a sustainable rural renewal. With poet Paul Williams, philosophers and theologians must begin to probe the meaning and purpose of creation and the human place and role within it:

Homo sap, that creature who believes his purpose is to control and conquer Nature, is just now beginning to remember the obvious--that he is a part of Nature himself.

He has fought his way to the top of the planetary spinal cord, inflicting damage every step of the way. Now, bewildered, he looks around: What am I doing here? 5

It is especially important that these thinkers be integrating

4

Freudenberger, Gift of Land, 22.

5

Joe Paddock, Nancy Paddock, and Carol Bly, Soil and Survival (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1986), 169.

such a question as the meaning of human existence, with the purposes of civilization and Nature. They must begin to search for a metaphysics of life not just its individual components.

It is the purpose of the next chapter to examine several of the recent responses to provide such a cosmology--"responsible stewardship," "romantic idealism," "deep ecology"--and show how the process metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead modifies, fuses and advances the consistency of their arguments. Many of the insights which have been proposed by Christian thinkers within the four case studies will be brought together in what is hoped will be a more rational synthesis. In the process, such speculations must continually be grounded in order to see if they are relevant "to the ordinary stubborn facts" of rural life.⁶ Such a synthesis must be more than a mere sentimentalization of rural life, yet must make sense of the power of this sentiment. It must take into account that rural life is but one mode of the whole process of life, not an isolated monad which can be dissected and described apart from the entire life impulse and the potency of human civilization.

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Whitehead, Process and Reality, xii.

CHAPTER 5

Metaphysics of Rural Life

Recent Metaphysical Constructs for Ecological Ethics

For the purposes of clarification and analysis I have differentiated three types of human/worldviews in recent eco-philosophy and theology. They are not necessarily isolated but in fact have many overlapping positions and players. They share many basic assumptions and strategies. After developing and citing problems inherent in these three metaphysical schemes I shall articulate a process understanding of the humans in creation as derived from the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead. Finally, I shall compare and contrast these three recent responses with the Whiteheadian scheme and conclude with some suggestions for application toward a sound, ecological philosophy of creation, civilization and agriculture.

Responsible Stewardship

The Biblical view of man's relation to nature is definitely anthropocentric, but devoid of false confidence in the results of man's mastery...Man lives in the context of history and community and his decisions regarding nature must be responsible to that setting. He does not enjoy absolute right of disposition over natural resources, but is their steward, the caretaker of the Divine owner, using them and preserving their usefulness to future ages.¹

Stewardship theology has been one of the most popular re-

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Santmire, 4.

sponses among Christians. It represents the non-human creation as created by God at a lower level than the humans and given to them by God. They are responsible to use it for the glory of God. Contrary to some earlier versions of this paradigm which portrayed the creation as handed over "gratis" to rational humans, recent stewardship thinkers have stressed that the "gift" has conditions. It can be taken away if the humans misuse it or only seek their own glory. The humans are the one creature answerable to God. The Master owns the household and the human stewards are to govern it on God's behalf and for the harmony of the household.

Another important development in this type of theology was the recognition that the steward was a member of the household. Though uniquely called out and given responsibility, the steward is still made "out of the dust". Sin is evident when the steward tries to play the role of the Master or seeks to own the house. There is a wide gulf between the Master and the servant, and recognition of this difference is the key to wise use.

In addition, responsible stewardship grants a reverent respect to all other physical elements. The steward recognizes that other parts of the creation have value because they were created "ex nihilo" by God and called good. There is a direct relationship not necessarily mediated by the humans, as Francis Schaeffer attests,

If God treats the tree like a tree, the machine like a machine, the man like a man, shouldn't I, as a fellow-creature, do the same--treating each thing in integrity in its own order? And for the highest

reason: because I love God--I love the One who has made it! Loving the Lover who has made it, I have respect for the thing He has made.²

The act of caring for the "gift" is an act of devotion to the Giver. It is not just a duty to respect creation but also an act of devotion.

Certainly the steward rules the roost but that rule is to be tempered by the rule of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve and give His life. Loren Wilkinson emphasizes this service mentality when he insists,

....the rights of lordship are to be exercised for the benefit of others, not simply for ourselves. The example and the power....is the sacrificial death of Christ.³

The creation is not only a gift, with which humans have kinship and for which they have respect, but also must be ruled over for its own benefit as well as the humans' benefit.

A final characteristic is that the main function of the steward is to preserve the creation. Jurgen Moltman asks,

Does the Creator need a representative and steward on earth? Apparently he does, for he transfers to human beings the preservation and continuation of the earthly side of creation.⁴

The humans stand as guarddogs protecting the creation from its demise. They should be at the forefront of efforts to

² Francis Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1970), 57.

³ Loren Wilkinson, ed., Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 239.

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, God in Creation (London, SCM Press, 1985), 224.

preserve and conserve natural resources for future human
usage, and for protection of species from extinction.⁵

The stewardship role has not only appealed to concerned Christians but also to nature preservationists, bureaucrats in Soil Conservation and Bureau of Reclamation Departments, and New Age thinkers. In the latter cases, rather than God bestowing the creation upon the humans the Giver might be technology, evolution or the government. But much of the steward role remains the same: the humans are uniquely responsible, have the power through reason and technology to create a harmonious interface between all life, and need to preserve nature for use by future generations.

For Christians one of the drawbacks of the stewardship model is the ambiguity of its Biblical foundation. It may be intuited from many passages but is never forthrightly announced. Many efforts have been made to resolve the "domination" model of Genesis 1 with the more "service" model of Genesis 2 as it pertains to the human relationship to creation. Some would say that the "steward" represents the best compromise between the two because the steward manages or "rules" but does so for the sake of another--never selfishly. Yet, not once is the human called the steward of creation in the Bible. Rather, it is God who is the caretaker, the

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Theologians of hope also add that the humans as stewards may play a role as liberators, setting free not only the humans but also all of nature from bondage for the possibilities God has in store for it. The resurrection makes possible the Incarnation of God not only in humans but also by extension in all nature.

provider, the protector of the creatures and other physical elements. Except for Genesis 1 and 9, and Psalm 8 there is little to indicate such a cosmic management system with the humans as Chief Executive Officer. Even in these passages the main intent appears to be that the humans use other species for food, not that we are meant to control all aspects of their destiny.

That such a model has become so connected with Christianity only goes to show how underlaid so much of theology is with other metaphysical presuppositions. The origin of this metaphor is more accurately placed at the doorstep of despotic political and economic relationships than reference to Biblical principles. It is fashioned after the single power-source model: one being has all the power from whom others are dele-⁶gated limited power and blessing. Though conducive to certain types of worship and dutiful response for fear that the owner might show up at any moment and demand payment, this model often leads to a desultory service. Looking over one's shoulder for the boss to show up results in boredom and lack of creativity. Such a framework has been used to justify the "divine right of kings" and other religious and political officials who, because of their exceptional gifts, are taking care of "lower" orders.

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Two articles by Dan Rhoades, "From Servants/Slaves to Joint Heirs" and "Steward as Joint Heir," Journal of Stewardship 37 (1985): 12-22, trace the source of this symbol and seek to articulate a new vision of stewardship as "joint-heirs" rather than the "master-slave" model.

The most troublesome implication in this model is that the Master has taken off and left the household in charge of someone else. Such a picture goes against so much tradition and intuition which supports the active participation of God in the creation. It is also the seed of a mechanistic understanding of the universe. The next step along this path is to substitute certain laws as the stewards of creation. The absence of a creative God at work in the world also has other results: "without a perception of the Creator Spirit in the world there cannot be a peaceful community of creation in which human beings and nature share."⁷ In other words, the weaker creatures of the human or other species appear to have no recourse for injustice but to the hope that the stewards do their job well. Stewardship power can corrupt under the guise of doing God's will.

Furthermore--given the dualistic universe implicit in the stewardship construct--even if there were direct commands to be stewards, there is certainly no reason to believe Christians would follow through with this command. Our history with very specific petitions to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, sell all we have, etc. has been negligent to say the least. There is little metaphysical grounding to support such commands. We do them when we feel like it. So, too, with stewardship the entire brunt of the model is built on the human

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Moltmann, 99.

willingness to play the role of a beneficent lord. Even with enlightened self-interest, stewardship goes in fits and bursts of revival of piety. Many of the same Christians who so actively promoted this stewardship model in the early 1970s have already abandoned it for new causes. Much the same can be said for governmental stewardship programs. As soon as the government needs money the Interior and Agriculture Departments are more than happy to sell off their birthrights.

A final critique which must be reflected upon by those who support this theology is that all evidence seems to point in the opposite direction for its main function. That is, it is not the creation which needs the humans but the humans who need the creation. The world was pronounced good before the humans arrived and it seems that it would get along fine--if not immeasurably better--without the humans. It does not need protecting by the humans but needs protection from them.

Romantic Idealism

Statistically, the probability of any one of us being here is so small that you'd think the mere fact of existing would keep us all in a contented dazzlement of surprise. We are alive against the stupendous odds of genetics...The normal, predictable state of matter throughout the universe is randomness, a relaxed sort of equilibrium...We, in brilliant contrast, are completely organized structures...Each of us is a self-contained, free-standing individual, labeled by specific protein configurations at the surfaces of cells...You'd think we'd never stop dancing. 8

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Lewis Thomas, The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher (New York: Viking, 1974), 165-66.

This "new" response is really quite old. Its lineage includes agrarians, transcendentalists and Romantic philosophers. What is novel today is that its ranks now include many scientists and academics. Much of this tradition has already been described (see above pp. 39-42).⁹ What remains to be understood is some of its more modern proponents.

Teilhard de Chardin and Paul Tillich represent some of the more theological expressions of this tradition. The latter's sacramental theology designates the Presence of the Divine throughout the creation not simply in the bread and wine. Since the sixties many of the cross-cultural appeals to Eastern religions have been motivated by the search for other theological traditions which respect and reverence Nature.¹⁰

Historically, critics of this approach to nature have been legion. Social Darwinists and National Socialists be-

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Several elaborations on the transcendentalists can be made here. Thoreau expresses the need to articulate "the other side of life": "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness--to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement...for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school-committee and every one of you will take care of that." (White and White, 33.) Also concerning natural revelation, Nature reveals a greater reality beyond itself in another quotation from Sir Thomas Browne: "There are two books from whence I collect my Divinity, besides that written one of God, another of His servant Nature, that universal and public manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the Eyes of all; those that never saw Him in the one, have discovered Him in the other." Hendry, 56.

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An abbreviated but comprehensive review of the assistance Christian ecologists are receiving from the Eastern traditions is found in Paddock, Paddock and Bly, 120-127.

lieved they were "following nature" through glorification of competition and elimination of the "weaker" elements in society. The end result--National Socialism--brought disdain for natural philosophy and theology.

Also, a dichotomy between human works and Nature's creations is built up. Santayana criticized Transcendentalism as a "sham system of Nature."¹¹ By placing Nature "out there" it left the human free to run rampant in cities and agriculture. Indeed, as developments encroached on "wild" nature this tradition took on a defensive posture. Just as evangelicalism and fundamentalism created an impregnable fortress out of the "inner life" of the soul, so, too, did this tradition create bastions of Nature in parks and suburban backyards. Nature became a place to go ease the alienated mind after work or on the weekend, much as the church building was a quiet retreat from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Thus, it is a system still largely infected by a mind-body dualism.

Also, such romantic idealism can be anthropocentric in that Nature's purpose is still defined according to human needs. It is a resource to be used by the human spirit. Wendell Berry has made the startling correspondence that both the strip miner and the Sierra Club member have this in common; they objectify Nature.¹² As such it can only exist

¹¹

Bill Devall and George Sessions, Deep Ecology (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985), 47.

¹²

Berry, 25-29, 100. Berry describes the mind-body dualism of conservationist organizations like the Sierra Club by citing their purpose of "protecting scenic resources."

"preserved" like a specimen in the formaldehyde bottle. In this preserved status it takes on the character of a picture which the humans observe in a museum. It is static. It does not grow or change. It is only "alive" as it moves the human observer to wonder and awe.

It is also anthropocentric in the isolation of the human mind and its creations. Most contrivances of the human are conceived as anti-Nature so that the human is essentially separated from Nature. Even within Nature those elements which do not accord with the subjectivist's sensibilities are abhorred or ignored. "Nature red in tooth and claw" is not part of the plan. The result is that many who deeply reverence Nature and desire to "save" endangered species fail to bring ethical reflection to bear on the more practical and profound-¹³ ly influential dimensions of their existence. They can often resemble antique collectors. Nature is revered but only in its "temple"--parks, refuges, wilderness areas, backyards.

The implication of the word "scenic" is that it has "view potential" for the human mind. Another characteristic of this movement is its quantification of "awe." That is, the number of miles hiked, the height of a mountain, the number of climbs, etc. seem to be more important for inspiration than simple communion. Finally, another dualism is exposed in many these organizations' attitude toward beauty: a "scene" is beautiful if it is untouched by humans; ugly if it shows any sign of the human presence. This latter description is most apt for the Audubon Magazine.

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The Sierra Club has recently changed its focus to include such subjects as acid rain, strip mining, agriculture and what are the pressures behind their development. It is also to be commended for its role as publisher of Berry's paperback version of Culture and Agriculture and the Paddocks' Soil and Survival.

Ecological Egalitarianism

A new response is currently being articulated in the "deep ecology" movement. It closely resembles the reverence for nature movement. It too seeks a "reenchantment of nature." It, too, deeply distrusts the powers of human reason. Where it differs is the place of the humans in this reenchanting nature. Its normative vision is "ecological egalitarianism in principle." The only way to reverse the degradation of this world is to rid it of all anthropocentrism and subjectivism. Its basic principles are :

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves-- independent of human usefulness.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values....
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interface with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed...(affecting) basic economic, technological and ideological structures.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality...rather than a higher standard of living.¹⁴

Some deep ecologists cite Spinoza's metaphysics to support their worldview based on the idea of unity: "there can be

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Devall and Sessions, 70.

only one Substance or non-dualism which is infinite, and this Substance is also God or Nature."¹⁵ Thus, individual things such as humans or plants are merely "temporary expressions of the continual flux of God/Nature/Substance."¹⁶ An important aspect of the deep ecology movement is that it starts with the spiritual rather than empirical observation of Nature. Akin to Spinoza and Heidegger the deep ecologists seek to consider first the divine nature. Knowledge of the first cause was more important than the final cause. Rather than creating a philosophical system they seek to form a new religion which fulfills innate human needs of wonder, reverence and celebration. With Heidegger they insist on an "ontological priority of feelings,"¹⁷ The primary feeling is a "felt intimacy with the unity of reality."¹⁸ This right relationship with reality gives us a center of value more profound than any ethic. We pass to a deeper sense of reality and thus experience joy.

Deep ecologists are critical of New Age thinkers, idealistic subjectivists, and Whitehead and process theologians for their anthropocentrism which places humans at the top of a "pecking order in this moral barnyard" because of their higher

¹⁵ Devall and Sessions, 238.

¹⁶ Devall and Sessions, 238.

¹⁷ Joseph Grange, "Being, Feeling and Environment," Environmental Ethics 7 (Winter 1984): 363.

¹⁸ Grange, 363.

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sentience or consciousness. Rather,

all particular things are expressions of God; through all of them God acts. There is no hierarchy. There is no purpose, no final causes such that one can say that the "lower" exist for the sake of the "higher." There is an ontological democracy or equalitarianism....20

Some would even go so far as to advocate the elimination of the human species since it has violated this principle of democracy.²¹ Others would say that the only alternative is to reduce the human population to several hundred million and return to the hunting-gathering lifestyle.²² "The future primitive would not live in two worlds but would be integrated with the surroundings."²³ There are no boundaries or "ontological divides" between humans and other parts of creation.

Several deep ecological maxims as they relate specifically to the human relationship with the creation are given by Barry Commoner: "Any major man-made change in a natural system is likely to be detrimental to that system," "There is no such thing as a free lunch," "Nature knows best," "The world eco-

19
Devall and Sessions, 244.

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Devall and Sessions, 240.

21
Edward Abbey, Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

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"In Deep Ecology, we have the goal not only of stabilizing human population but also of reducing it to a sustainable minimum without revolution or dictatorship. I should think we must have no more than 100 million people if we are to have the variety of cultures we had 100 years ago." Devall and Sessions, 75.

23
Devall and Sessions, 176.

logical system is too complex for human beings ever to understand."²⁴ Also, "No one is saved until we are all saved" and "simple in means, rich in ends" are rallying slogans. The "summum bonum" is defined as "the beauty, integrity and stability of an ecosystem."²⁵ Humans must give other species the same moral consideration as themselves. They must have adequate moral reasoning for killing any other individual creature.

Many female philosophers and theologians have been attracted to the deep ecology perspective. One, in fact, says²⁶ that the feminist movement is "deeper" than deep ecology. Whereas the latter starts with the premise of alienation from God/Nature, eco-feminist Ariel Salleh wishes to say that the females of the species "never left." Elizabeth Dodson Gray believes that an ecological metaphysic must incorporate the female emphasis on "relatedness." Thus, Gray insists,

We should learn to find value in each part as well as in the welfare of the whole, just as parents make decisions about what will benefit each individual child and the family as a unit."²⁷

Ethical decisions are not made by hierarchical principles but by a balancing of individual worth with a sense of the whole.

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Arne Naess, "A Defense of the Deep Ecology Movement," Environmental Ethics 6 (Fall 1984), 268.

²⁵

Devall and Sessions, 86.

²⁶

Ariel K. Salleh, "Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection," Environmental Ethics 6 (Winter 1984): 339.

²⁷

Paddock, et al., 96.

With these feminists many deep ecologists seek to re-orient ethics and religion away from acts of mind and will to passive intuitive/feeling experiences. There is action but it is not directed toward causes but rather toward attuning oneself to "the round dance of appropriation."²⁸ Developing maturity does not take labor, discipline and planning but releasing oneself to flow like water down through a canyon. The human place in the creation is to "sit down, breathe deeply, and just feel where you are."²⁹

One of the most basic problems with deep ecology is the issue of hierarchy. For all its emphatic desire to eliminate it from human conceptions of the universe, the plain fact is that no human or any other creature could exist without taking advantage of some other species or molecules. The question is not whether creatures use other creatures but how they use them. Most societies based on monistic metaphysics continue to have hierarchies but they are not open for critique. As Wendell Berry writes, "To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation."³⁰ By not taking seriously this essential fact of all life the deep ecologists are

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Devall and Sessions, 204.

29

Devall and Sessions, 206.

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Wendell Berry, The Gift of Good Land, (San Francisco: North Point, 1981), 281. Since he was criticised by Richard Watson in "Interests, Rights, and Self-Consciousness," Environmental Ethics 4 (1982): 285-87, Naess has begun to acknowledge the more environmentally sound position that all species do modify and alter their habitats just as the humans do. See such a change in Bill Devall and George Sessions, "The Development of Nature Resources," Environmental Ethics 6 (Winter 1984): 293-322.

committing their cardinal sin of anthropocentrism: they are isolating the humans as the species which should change the way it alters its habitat. Then, to suggest that the humans ought to artificially limit their population or lifestyles to achieve the goal of species equality, seems to violate the deep ecologists' desire to reorient ethics away from acts of mind and will. Such is the critique of Ariel Salleh,

this kind of intervention in life processes is supremely rationalist and technicist, and quite at odds with the restoration of life-affirming values that is so fundamental to the ethic of deep ecology.³¹

The deep ecologists appear to be as anthropocentric and rationalist as their foes, yet without acknowledging such biases.

Indeed, it appears imperative within the deep ecology metaphysic that the only way to curb human destruction is to think anthropocentrically. Otherwise, it is not possible to counter the following argument: the ecosystem/God has evolved a creature--the human--which can radically exploit other parts of the system for its own benefit and therefore should be allowed to live out its destiny. Even seemingly sordid and perverted human behavior must be classified as "natural" within this system.³² The deep ecologists must finally admit with

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Salleh, 340.

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Richard A. Watson, "A Critique of Anti-Anthropocentric Biocentrism," Environmental Ethics 5 (Fall 1983): 252. "Only if we are thinking anthropocentrically will we set the human species apart as the species that is to be thwarted in its natural behavior....Man is so wonderfully bad that he is to be allowed to live out his evolutionary potential in egalitarian interaction with all other species."

the Marquis de Sade, "Whatever is, is right." Who are the deep ecologists to thwart the evolutionary potential of humans?

Another problem somewhat related to this one is the idea that in a radical democracy there should be a government based on "one creature, one vote." If this were to be the case then, since there is little to commend the human species to the rest of the planet, it would seem most appropriate to vote them out of office and exile them to some preserve where they could be kept under guard.

Finally, the same critique which Whitehead submits for Spinoza is also valid for the deep ecologists: by eliminating final causality there appears to be no place for freedom, purpose or change. How can one even exhort someone to "go with nature" if everything is already following eternal necessity? Is it even possible to use "should"? The deep ecologist's universe is static. There is little awareness of growth and change, nor creaturely freedom to create novelty. It is essentially conservative, seeking "stability," "balance," "order," and "maintenance."

Each of these three worldviews--responsible stewardship, romantic idealism and deep ecology--offer some hope for rural renewal. Yet the significant problems outlined above indicate the need for a more complex metaphysics which helps to understand the intricate web of human and ecological development with the theological quest for the meaning and purpose of creation. Such an understanding can provide the framework to devise effective strategies to reverse rural degradation.

Alfred North Whitehead's Process Metaphysics

What metaphysics requires is a solution exhibiting the plurality of individuals as consistent with the unity of the Universe, and a solution which exhibits the World as requiring its union with God, and God as requiring his Union with the World.³³

It is the thesis of this section that the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead can assist in negotiating a common ground between orthodox Judeo-Christian theology and the claims of the deep ecologists, romanticists and stewards. Such a metaphysic must be comprehensive, elucidating not only a land or ecological ethic but incorporating them into the whole of human and non-human life. For, as Whitehead proposes,

It is the business of philosophical theology to provide a rational understanding of the rise of civilization, and of the tenderness of mere life itself, in a world which superficially is founded upon the clashings of senseless compulsion.³⁴

As well, in the end, such a metaphysic must speak practically to the present needs of rural life. Such analysis should help to create a more sustainable interface between humans and the creation and can be articulated as one which (1) prevents the mining of physical resources without hope of regeneration, (2) maintains the lure of the creative advance for novelty, complexity and value in civilization, and (3) includes the worship and wonder of a living, personal God at work in and caring for the World.

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Whitehead, Adventures, 168.

³⁴

Whitehead, Adventures, 170.

The metaphysical basis of agriculture or any other human activity must resonate the complexity and sensitivity of the entire life process. It is for this reason that it is first important to understand Whitehead's foundation for the world.

The Foundation of the World

The task of Theology is to show how the World is founded on something beyond mere transient fact, and how it issues in something beyond the perishing of occasions. The temporal world is the stage of finite accomplishment.³⁵

Metaphysics and philosophical theology all have as their proper subject the relationship of humans and the human project to the World of all perishing occasions. All philosophies have as their starting point the human experience and Whitehead's is no different epistemologically. Language, logic and abstraction originate in the human mind. Also, this is true in a deeper sense for Whitehead, since as David Griffin suggests,

(he) uses human experience as the analogue for understanding what other actual entities are like in themselves, since our own human experience is the one place we have direct experience of what an individual is in and for itself.³⁶

Whitehead attributes the same perceptive feeling-tones of the human species to all experient occasions.

Having said this, it is important to distinguish Whitehead's metaphysics from his epistemology so as to understand his revision of the subjectivist-sensationalist doctrine. There is no human perceiver who stands aloof from reality; in

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Whitehead, Adventures, 172.

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David Ray Griffin, comments to author, 10 March 1987.

fact there is no actual occasion that is not "a throbbing of experience including the actual world within its scope."³⁷

Each actual occasion is objectified in another actual occasion. There is a "togetherness of experience" allowing no

...disjunction between the component elements of individual experience on the one hand, and on the other hand the component elements of the external world. 38

The many becoming one confirms the essential interrelatedness of all life. No actual occasion is self-sufficient:

The aspects of all things enter into its very nature. It is only itself as drawing together into its own limitation the larger whole in which it finds itself.³⁹

Consequently, for Whitehead, there is a microscopic and macroscopic ecological web of life.

The difficulty most other modern philosophy has "describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal" (Whitehead, PR, 49), which often ends in solipsism of the present moment, is absent for process philosophy. Rather, for Whitehead, all the creation is interconnected,

We find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures; whereas under some disguise or other, orthodox philosophy can only introduce us to solitary substances, each enjoying an illusory experience.⁴⁰

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Whitehead, Process and Reality, 190.

38

Whitehead, Process, 189.

39

Whitehead, Science, 94.

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Whitehead, Process, 50. Albert Einstein also notes this illusory experience which modern humans have: "A human

It is a representational democracy, not a direct one. There is no enduring substance present in the particular individual, yet every actual occasion is present in every other actual occasion.

Thus far, there is great similarity between Whitehead and Spinoza. However, Whitehead does not then define his "individuals" as inferior "modes" of the one substance. Rather the philosophy of organism (Whitehead's) differs from Spinoza,

....by the abandonment of the subject-predicate forms of thought, so far as concerns the presupposition that his form is a direct embodiment of the most ultimate characterization of fact. The result is that the substance-quality concept is voided; and that morphological description is replaced by description of dynamic process. Also, Spinoza's "modes" now become sheer actualities; so that though analysis of them increases our understanding, it does not lead us to the discovery of any higher grade of reality. 41

In other words, we can attribute intrinsic worth to individual entities not because they are modes of some higher grade of reality but because they are the only grade of reality. It

being is a part of the whole called by us "Universe," a part limited in space and time. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." Joanna Macy, Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: New Society, 1983), 25.

41

Whitehead, Process, 7.

bears repeating again:

Actual entities....are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. 42

The electrons, molecules, and other organisms and creatures of the World are its foundation.

There is no "dead matter": each element shares in some degree of self-organization and self-determination. Susan Armstrong-Buck has written that,

Whitehead's system allows us to affirm objective, intrinsic value in nature without qualification based not upon my (extended) self-interest, but upon the self-significance of each actual occasion.43

She concludes with his assertion of inherent value and a reference to William James:

We have no right to deface the value-experience which is the very essence of the universe. The existence of each actual occasion matters to it, as it lives, in William James memorable phrase, with "an inner joy of living as hot or hotter" than our own. 44

Whitehead might not agree with James that their joy could be hotter than our own, but he would endorse the sense of liveliness and self-importance articulated here.

It is the interplay between these real actual entities and their environment which constitutes the "substance" of Whitehead's view of reality. It is a dynamic process, a power of transition, concretion, prehension and satisfaction. There

42

Whitehead, Process, 18.

43

Salleh, 246.

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Salleh, 246.

are no "bits" of matter that are stationary; life moves:

Power is the compulsion of composition....The essence of power is the drive towards aesthetic worth for itself...It constitutes the drive of the universe.⁴⁵

For Whitehead, to ignore either the interplay between the organism and its environment or the intrinsic worth of the environment is evil. Either disregard leads to simple location of a being and its fragmentation from the whole.

Inherent in this interplay is a factor of which many environmental ethicists are loathe to take notice. This is the intuition that "life is robbery." It is part of the structure of reality that all life depends on the death of other actual occasions. This is true both for societies and for individual actual occasions. "Decay, Transition, Loss, Displacement belong to the essence of the Creative Advance."⁴⁶ The "use" or "exploitation" of individuals and societies is not a contingent "evil" but essential to the very process of life. By this destruction new actual occasions gain the food/energy to attain new depths of satisfaction. The web of life is also a web of death. The robber requires justification and this is precisely why an ecological ethic must not romanticize or tame nature but incorporate this process with final ends.⁴⁷

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Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York: Free Press, 1968), 119.

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Whitehead, Adventures, 286.

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See L. Charles Birch and John Cobb, The Liberation of Life (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 194-195: "Some have devoted themselves through a lifetime of public service without the apparent need to believe that any ultimate purpose is thereby served. Bertrand Russell is a striking example. But others have grown cynical....There are several astute observ-

Similar to this recognition of loss as evil is Whitehead's inclusion of disorder in the foundation of life. Decay, loss and displacement are often glossed over in other philosophies or introduced as an appendix. Whitehead, on the other hand, takes seriously the fundamental reality of confusion, decay and frustration.⁴⁸ Both multiplicity and unity are fundamental aspects of the Universe.

One of the critiques of Whitehead by the deep ecologists has been that he keeps a "moral pecking order." As we explore his own particular version of hierarchy it is important to distinguish it from anthropocentrism. The latter assumes a "deadness," an absence, of life or spirit in the non-human creation. As should be evident by now this is not Whitehead's picture of reality.

For Whitehead, experience is not egalitarian but multi-leveled. As each organism makes its "bid for freedom" its actions are less and less explainable by physical inheritance

ers who believe that without some grounding of meaning beyond the flux of events, with their inevitable ending in death, human beings cannot find the zest to motivate needed actions. The conclusion would be that trust in Life cannot be sustained unless one can trust Life to achieve some end other than extinction."

48

"It is a temptation for philosophers that they should weave a fairy tale of the adjustment of factors; and then as an appendix introduce the notion of frustration, as a secondary aspect. I suggest to you that this is the criticism to be made on the monistic idealisms of the nineteenth century, and even of the great Spinoza. It is quite incredible that the absolute, as conceived in monistic philosophy, should evolve confusion about its own details." Whitehead, Modes, 50. The same criticism could be made of an Augustinian metaphysic which introduces the "Fall" as the origin of confusion and death.

and consequently it is more "alive." As such, life could be defined as hierarchical but is so from "the bottom up." That is, it is built like a pyramid. The top blocks are the focus of attention but it is the bottom ones that have the most instrumental value. This is so, according to David Griffin,

since the intrinsic and instrumental (in the sense of the ecological) value of all things is about reversed, i.e. the more intrinsic value, the less ecological value (e.g. humans); the less intrinsic value, the more ecological value (e.g., bacteria, plankton).⁴⁹

Humans are not the center of existence as if life revolved around them. They are merely the highest grade of a living, growing "pyramid" of life. There is a hierarchy in life, but not one which encourages exploitation by the higher forms over the lower forms. All forms of life have intrinsic value and the lower ones have much more instrumental (ecological) value. The humans might be the Representatives in Washington, D.C. but it is all the other forms of life which are our home constituency.

It is important to remember that for Whitehead the "environment" is no more than the "past" of each actual occasion. Also, the impact each actual occasion has on its environment is for the future. There is no present environment that is known or affected by human actions. As a result, all the characteristics which he attributes to the past and future are part of the relationship humans have with the world around them. The environment of the past imposes itself on them. In

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David Ray Griffin, comments to author, 10 March 1987.

turn, the humans, and to a certain extent, all creation, anticipate the results of their actions for the future.

That which endures is limited, obstructive, intolerant, infecting its environment with its own aspects. But it is not self-sufficient. The aspects of all things enter into its very nature. It is only itself as drawing together into its own limitation the larger whole in which it finds itself. Conversely it is only itself by lending its aspects to this same environment in which it finds itself. 50

So human experience of our own bodies and the larger physical environment has the same origin as "our sense of unity with our immediate past of personal experience." 51 There is a general continuity between human experience and physical occasions.

Thus, the solidarity of the world through time is maintained. As we experience the weight of the past--the mistakes of our forebears in mistreating the environment--we have true anticipatory feelings for future generations which can dramatically affect our actions in the present. There is a freedom to act in the present, remembering the past and anticipating the future. 52 Hartshorne calls this aspect of the occasion to know its future "contributionism"; Whitehead calls it foresight.

The foundation for decision making and action in an ecological ethic rests in this anticipation of the future:

The subjective aim, whereby there is origination of conceptual feeling, is an intensity of feeling (a)

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Whitehead, Science, 94.

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Whitehead, Adventures, 189.

52 See description of this freedom in Birch and Cobb, 183-88.

in the immediate subject, and (b) in the relevant future. This double aim--at the immediate present and the relevant future--is less divided than appears on the surface. For the determination of the relevant future, and the anticipatory feeling respecting provision for its grade of intensity, are elements affecting the immediate complexity of feeling. The greater part of morality hinges on the determination of relevance in the future. The relevant future consists of those elements in the anticipated future which are felt with effective intensity by the present subject by reason of the real potentiality for them to be derived from itself. 53

We have genuine ethical intuitions because we actually take account of the relevant future in our present decisions as they seek intrinsic satisfaction. As a result, David Griffin concludes,

we can give up a certain kind of behavior which may bring intrinsic satisfaction but that is instrumentally destructive if we realize there are alternative possibilities that would bring equal or more intrinsic satisfaction and that, by not being environmentally destructive, would be sustainable for a longer period....54

This type of ecological morality provides both an immediate intensity as well as a contribution for the future. The intrinsic satisfaction derived from ethical decisions including the maximum number of ecological possibilities enhances the value of life.

The anticipation of the future can have a dramatic impact on the ideals formulated by various religious moralities such as happened with the founders of Christianity. The very impracticability of their ethics was partially caused by their expectation of the end of the world. So, Whitehead surmises,

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Whitehead, Process, 27.

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David Ray Griffin, comments to author, 10 March 1987.

The result was that with passionate earnestness they gave free reign to their ethical intuitions respecting ideal possibilities without a thought for the preservation of society. 55

Thus, the anticipation of the future can function not only to assist humans in giving up destructive behavior but also to formulate new ideals and visions which are not now practicable. Such appears to be one of the greatest contributions of the doomsayers of both ecological and nuclear catastrophes.

Not only does Whitehead's perception of the future help us to sort out possibilities in the present but it makes real choice meaningful. For in the philosophy of organism the future does not have causal efficacy in the present. We do really make a difference by the choices we decide upon. Human responsibility for ecological actualization is at its greatest in Whitehead's scheme. However strongly the past and God are influencing the present, the future is still not determined. Thoroughgoing determinism is rejected and so an ethic which is more than "mores" is made possible.

Concluding this understanding of Whitehead's description of the foundation of the World is his notion of the di-polarity of each actual occasion. The humans are not the only part of creation which enjoys its existence or decides upon its future--only the highest grade. It is not necessary to introduce some bifurcated spiritual world into nature to make it "alive" or "respected":

Any instance of experience is di-polar, whether that instance be God or an actual occasion of the world. The origination of God is from the mental pole, the origination of an actual occasion is from the physical pole; but in either case the elements, consciousness, thought, sense-perception, belong to the derivative "impure" phases of concrescence... 56

"Spirit" and "body" are not two separate realities but inextricably intertwined in all actual occasions of all life. If there is any "dualism" in Whitehead it is found in the process, itself, of the many and the one, the multiplicity and unity of all life. None of the operations of concretion, prehension, feeling or satisfaction of the actual occasion "can be segregated from nature into the privacy of a mind. Mental and physical operations are incurably intertwined; and both issue into publicity, and are derived from publicity." 57

Expression of Perfection in Finite Nature

For Whitehead the "oughtness" of why anyone should be concerned about the degradation of our environment rests in the lure of God. The initial aim given to each actual occasion he believes will always seek to maximize truth, beauty, adventure and peace; and not only for the present but also to maximize them for the future. God does not infuse a desire to disdain the World but to be immersed in it, study it, empathize with it and act in such a way as to create more freedom and creative power. An appropriate Whiteheadian maxim to replace the Romanticist "go with nature" might be "go with God."

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Whitehead, Process, 36.

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Whitehead, Process, 317.

Without God there would be neither preservation of the past nor novelty for the future. Both are necessary ingredients in a healthy functioning ecosystem. Without the permeation of routine there would be no nexus, living or non-living, only the senseless smashing of quarks in space. Yet, preservation is no insurance of the continuation of life. Because God is always luring toward greater complexity or intensity of feeling, human civilizations which decide to "stand still" simply repeating the past will not be "preserved."

We have seen that there can be no real halt of civilization in the indefinite repetition of a perfected ideal. Staleness sets in; surprise, intensity of feeling collapses. 58

There is no such thing as balance, equilibrium, or eternal harmony, only growth. Perfection is not the attainment of a particular state but the maximization within each moment of the possibilities which God gives to remove the restraints on matter.

It is part of the adventure of our post-modern time to seek this kind of qualitative growth in human lifestyles rather than the quantitative usurpation of nature's vitalities. Human creativeness, as a parallel to God's creativeness --the *imago Dei*--ought to be luring all of creation toward greater complexity and freedom. The relationship humans have with other creatures ought not to be a controlling, oppressive dictatorship nor a protective removal of it into reservations. It is, to the contrary, a relationship of wooing and wonder.

Using up and disposing without regard to regeneration is that evil which is "the brute motive force of fragmentary purpose, disregarding the eternal vision. [It] is overruling, retarding, hurting."⁵⁹ Worship of this God is an "adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable."

Life, for Whitehead, is not a fact, but a value. All creatures must value life; it is not a given. They must have an urge to live, live well, and live better. This is the very tenderness of life of which Whitehead spoke of earlier. (See page 153 above.) Thus, the end of life is not defined by its competition, nor its technological complexity. Rather, as Birch and Cobb write,

To live well is to be more alive. We are most alive when we are most attuned, most in harmony, most stimulated, most integrated, most responsive, most loving, most accepting, most spontaneous, most honest and most innocent.⁶⁰

Civilization is not to be understood as a growth toward urbanization, mental busyness, complicated technology or cultural sophistication. To the contrary, for Whitehead it is the valuing of Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Peace and Adventure.

Finally, Whitehead's investigations into the consequent nature of God reveals a being who feels all the feelings of the entire creation. This is the part of God that sees even the sparrow fall or counts the hairs on our heads. This is a God who endures suffering rather than evading it or increasing it. "They know not what they do" but they might not do it

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Whitehead, Science, 192.

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Birch and Cobb, 106-107.

again if they see the suffering it causes God. When "our eyes are opened" to the presence of God as fellow sufferer with ecological destruction a new intensity of feeling for our fellow creatures is also stimulated. Too, though the rest of the creation might not care if the humans disappear, this God who has been at work over billions of years preserving, calling and feeling, would take it as a great loss to have them purposively, carelessly or accidentally foul or destroy their own nest. Yet life would go on.

It follows then that with the high level of choice which the high grade level of human experience ascertains--the freedom to go against the lure toward creativity--it is imperative that there be a commensurate level of religious vision.

The vision claims nothing but worship; and worship is a surrender to the claim for assimilation, urged with the motive force of mutual love. 61

It is this religious vision which provides any optimism that something can actually be done to change the destructive course which humans have chosen. "Apart from it, human life is a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience,"⁶² It is not an addendum to Whitehead's anthropology but that which provides hope as human consciousness increases. The raising of consciousness should lead humans to a greater sense of responsibility as they are enlivened by this hope.

61 Whitehead, Science, 192.

62 Whitehead, Science, 192.

It is a mark of advancement in civilization according to Whitehead to intuit this consequent nature of God. It is a feeling for the sacredness, the tenderness of life. "The discrimination of quality immensely increases the intensity of experience."⁶³ It is not the progress of science or technology which marks the higher civilizations but the intensity of this intuitional feeling of sacredness. The expression of perfection in this finite nature is not a realized ideal but a feeling felt, which in turn calls into being even more profound experiences.

Process cosmology accomplishes the tasks set before it and in so doing fulfills the need for a comprehensive foundation for an anthropology which is not alienated from Nature, and a terrology which does not separate the humans from Nature. The human being is naturalized through the doctrine of togetherness which maintains a mutual relativity between the human being and the world. Both the unity and plurality of individuals are sustained in the avoidance of substance in favor of dynamic process of sheer actual occasions. The rise of all higher organizations and living societies requires both the preservation and novel subjective aim provided by God. The requirement that God prehends all actual occasions preserves God's union with the world.

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Whitehead, Modes, 118.

Whitehead and Recent Ecological Metaphysics

Process philosophy's ecological ethic is not a radical diversion from the three other attempts to ground such an ethic with metaphysical categories. Rather, it should be seen as correcting them where they are contradictory, elucidating them where they are fuzzy and supplementing where they have avoided an intuitive insight that common sense hands over to philosophy. They are all basically after the same thing: to seek out the best way to describe the human relationship to Nature in the light of the recent awareness that the current relationship is destructive to all life.

Whitehead and Responsible Stewardship

Whitehead retains the "use" ethic of the "responsible stewardship" approach. Certain creatures have the biological right to use others for their own ends. Different degrees of intrinsic value may be surmised by appeal to final ends. The basis for choice is maintained. Also, the covenant between a creative, caring God and each creature is shared. There is retention of the intuition of free choice and the possibility of real evil in the ignorance of the eternal vision.

On the other hand, Whitehead avoids some of the difficulties of the "responsible stewardship" scheme. One of the principal features by which this is accomplished is the inversion of the source of the hierarchy. In the stewardship model, the humans received their authority to control creation from a God who made the world but then decides to hand it over to the

humans. Inherent in a Whiteheadian approach is the understanding that human power to control creation is not radically different from the power all creatures have to control their own destiny. This power has arisen up from the chaos of creativity by a dynamic process towards aesthetic worth. The human power is the highest grade of this power. Whitehead's approach is in more accord with a scientific understanding of the rest of creation and, also, evades a conception of the world as "dead matter." An analogy of this "bottom-up" stewardship is the ideal election of an American president. The modern experience has brought forth an intuition that

there may be another, better way in which personal dignity may be preserved even in relationship with legitimate ruling power, and in which rulers interact with and are limited by the intrinsic rights and interests of the governed.⁶⁴

The power such a leader has is not handed down as a "divine right" but rises up from the necessity for organization.

The role of God for Whitehead is not defined by absence nor by coercive power. The human as a "Whiteheadian steward" seeks to image the type of relationship God has with the world: luring all creatures toward a liberation of life.⁶⁵

Human "rule" has regard for this eternal vision and for regeneration even as it uses up and disposes for its own sake.

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Frederick Ferré, Shaping the Future (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 92.

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Birch and Cobb suggest that a "religion of Life" would be defined by a responsibility not to "control" life but to "trust" it; the freedom it strives for is the freedom God has: freedom for others, not freedom from others.

Too, Whitehead avoids all the master-slave dualism which has tended to be associated with this paradigm. Human "service" is not cursory obeisance but an adventure of the spirit. At the same time, there is an immediacy of necessity based not on fear but on the tenderness of life. Humans care because God cares and is present with all creation's sufferings. Humans care for the processes of life because such care makes them more "alive." Humans are consequently accountable not only to God but also to the earth.

Another facet of Whitehead's conception of power is that power rests in the very dynamic process of life, not in God alone, who then passes on some of it to humans. The stewardship model degrades the rest of Nature as either dead matter or as somehow being in need of humans to keep Nature going. On the contrary, for Whitehead, each species has the power to be fruitful and multiply after its own kind. They, as well as the humans, require God to provide novelty and growth, not power.

Whitehead and the Romanticists

The philosophy of organism is very supportive of certain characteristics of the Romantic Reverence approach. Both its view of nature's organic "aliveness" and nature's value are hailed by Whitehead, especially given the time during which they were first articulated. He supports its reaction to mechanistic determinism and valuing of aesthetic sensibilities. He likes the aesthetic intuition of a Southey, criticizing the world of 1830,

our age has invented atrocities beyond the imagination of our fathers; that society has been brought into a state compared with which extermination would be a blessing...[the way to know is to] stand on a hill, to look at a cottage and a factory, and to see which is prettier. 66

The "stone-blind eye" which could not make out this aesthetic appeal was, for Whitehead, in need of the Romantic critique.

The difficulty for the Romantics--be they poets or scientists--is that they are often standing outside nature, viewing it through a window. It is objective and we are subjective. What seems to matter for them is that Nature be "scenic." Whitehead avoids this by making no sharp dichotomies between humans and nature. Rather than asking the humans to go with nature, both human and non-human Nature is called to go with God. All actual occasions have the same features, only at different intensities, be they human or amoeba.

Whitehead takes seriously both the robbery and confusion of all life, thus avoiding a romantic sentimentality.

It is folly to look at the universe through rose-tinted spectacles. We must admit the struggle. The question is, who is to be eliminated. 67

Yet, by doing so he does not crash upon the shoals of Social Darwinism.

The struggle for existence has been construed into a gospel of hate. The full conclusion to be drawn from a philosophy of evolution is fortunately of a more

66 Whitehead, Science, 203.

67 Whitehead, Science, 205

balanced character. Successful organisms modify their environment. Those organisms are successful which modify their environments so as to assist each other. ⁶⁸

Like materialistic philosophy, Romanticism emphasizes, "the given quantity of material, and thence derivatively the given nature of the environment." ⁶⁹ Counter to this "fixed" environment Whitehead introduces freedom of choice to direct our lives toward greater and greater cooperation.

Whitehead and Ecological Egalitarians

As already noted, Whitehead's metaphysic bears certain resemblances to Spinoza's. So it is to be expected that his ethic would have many similarities with the deep ecologists who rely heavily on Spinoza. For example, the notion of an ecosystem as a biotic community resembles Whitehead's "associations of different species which mutually cooperate." ⁷⁰ With Naess and other deep ecologists Whitehead hails the forest as "a triumph of the organization of mutually dependent species."

Whitehead, though, altogether avoids the problem the egalitarians have with "modalism." Whereas for the latter the humans are no more than one mode of the one God/Nature/Substance, Whitehead maintains the intrinsic value of both the many and the one. Tom Regan has charged deep ecologists with

⁶⁸ Whitehead, Science, 205.

⁶⁹ Whitehead, Science, 205.

⁷⁰ Whitehead, Science, 206.

"environmental fascism" with their holistic idea,

in which what should be done to individuals is decided by appeals to aggregative considerations such as the good of the biotic community.⁷¹

Individuals of any species, in the egalitarian framework, appear to lack intrinsic value. On the other hand, Whitehead has resolved this issue by making the actual occasions the only "locus of intrinsic value, while recognizing the essential dependence of individual occasions upon the world as a whole"⁷² As philosopher Susan Armstrong-Buck observes,

the Whiteheadian approach escapes the difficulty through its recognition of both the individual's inherent value and its place in the biotic community.⁷³

Without being anthropocentric Whitehead provides a way for humans to make legitimate ethical decisions concerning the survival of both the individual and the life process.

By inverting Spinoza's modes, Whitehead also avoids the loss of novelty in the world and the incipient determinism of the egalitarian approach. David Griffin has pointed out the difficulties of those who affirm this latter position:

not only is the equality of value unliveable but they are in the awkward position of calling us freely to embrace a view that says we have no freedom. ⁷⁴

⁷¹ Susan Armstrong-Buck, "Whitehead's Metaphysical System as a Foundation for Environmental Ethics." Environmental Ethics 8 (Fall 1986): 256.

⁷²

Griffin, comments to author, 10 March 1987.

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Armstrong-Buck, 256.

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Griffin, comments to author, 10 March 1987.

The essence of the philosophy of organism which Whitehead sought to formulate was that no matter how much the past imposed itself on the present, each actual occasion retained some element of freedom for novelty. The world is founded not only on the "transient facts"--the repetitious mechanisms--but also exhibits an aim beyond itself toward something new. Then when this newness is accomplished in each actual occasion it is not altogether lost but imposes itself upon future occasions of experience. The roots of human behavior are in biology, the lure of God, and the free decision of each individual.

Thus, no given ecosystem at a given point in time is sacred for Whitehead. Rather, it is the very process of life itself that is sacred. Life has been persuaded into its becoming by God. There is no such thing as a static balance which has been achieved and should never be disturbed. The real problem to understand is life not endurance; the lifeless planets have endurance but not originality in their aggregate form.

For the solution of this problem Whitehead must resort to final causes. God initiates a disturbance with initial aim into the actual occasion so that it does not merely repeat itself; it has a divine discontent.

The characteristic of life is reaction adapted to the capture of intensity...but the reaction is dictated by the present and not by the past. It is the clutch at vivid immediacy. 75

Only in this way can true pluralism amidst unity be maintained. As Whitehead developed his ideas further in Adventures of Ideas, he added even more emphasis on final causes: "The essence of life is the teleological introduction of novelty, with some conformation of objectives."⁷⁶ Whereas in Process and Reality the societies tended to be "shackles" to the actual occasion's bid for freedom, in Adventures of Ideas it is the coordination of the individuals toward a final end that makes life "lively."

Summary

Thus, it can be concluded from the Whiteheadian schema that reality is biocentric in its teleology. Humans are not

isolated monads acting out absurd roles within a meaningless context, (but) are essential elements of a meaningful whole (whose) individual acts are vitally significant to the self-actualization of the process of human evolution itself and to the enhancement of value in the world.⁷⁷

More than most other societies of actual occasions the humans are able to anticipate the possibilities inherent in the decisions they make in daily life. We can thus transcend the "ordinary" flux of life for creativity or destruction to a degree much greater than other creatures. It behooves us then to be ecologically conscious because of this power, not because we want to be rid of it. Ecological decisions need not be "ad hoc" nor a modified utilitarianism based on the happi-

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Whitehead, Adventures, 207.

⁷⁷ Donald Scherer, ed. Ethics and the Environment (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 20.

ness of the most amount of creatures. To the contrary, with Whitehead, they are made with the intuition of the tenderness of life which leads to the greater intensity of experience. The more we learn to cooperate with other individuals and species, the more intense the feeling, and this Whitehead defines as "progress."

Such a cosmology is particularly appealing to me for its inclusiveness. All dimensions of reality have validity and are interrelated. It helps me to understand the place of human civilization as part of the life process, not foreign to it. The role of God as persuader and nurturer seems to be the most reasonable explanation of the way I--and other parts of the creation--experience the presence of God.

The Whiteheadian metaphysic incorporates the best of each of the recent attempts to create an ecological philosophy, as well as many of the insights of the previous case studies. The accountability of the stewardship model is maintained, the importance of feelings and being "in touch" with the creation is validated, and the self-significance of each member of the creation is guaranteed. The creation is not bi-furcated but whole. Still, there are distinctions based on complexity and feeling. A framework for moral decisions is preserved, yet enlarged to include all of life. This framework includes both short-term and ageless history, and continues through the present, with foresight, into the future. Finally, the impetus for responsible action is given by the non-deterministic model which supports the entire process.

CHAPTER 6

Summary and Conclusions

In the beginning of this project the primary concern was to trace the historical development of church-sponsored rural renewal projects. In so doing, it was hoped that the kind of "crisis-mongering" which prevails in so many "rural crisis" programs could be avoided, in favor of more enduring strategies. Cries for action are being voiced as rural people watch the last vestiges of their culture disappear beneath a flood of farm foreclosures, urbanization, and erosion. While some of the "band-aid" solutions are needed, it is the thesis of this project that more sustainable results can be had by forming our strategies around the existing foundations built by previous rural renewal projects.

In the light of this historical analysis and theological exploration, it is important to restate the problem. It is not only a lack of historical consideration in these rural renewal ministries, past and present. It also appears that there is a notable lack of theological critique. The two are related in that none of the ministries critically evaluated the assumptions behind both agriculture and theology, not their interconnections. As a result, their ministries were deficient. The problem they did not address is the same one which those who are working in this area today have ignored: people demand a rational, coherent worldview which makes sense

of the human historical role in creation. They never examined the theological roots of the human-world agricultural interface. Without such a world-view, as has been shown, no sustainable program can be put forth.

These ministries perceived many of the same problems which ecologists and rural leaders are sharing today: that our rural ecological communities are on the verge of collapse. They did not share some of the same environmental sophistication which is prevalent today but they noticed erosion, rural blight and poverty and injustices built into the urban-rural interchange.

The ones which relied upon the Social Gospel were unable to meet the challenge presented by the World Wars and Niebuhr that the instincts of humans do not always lend themselves to justice. Those which were based on Agrarian visions were written off as nostalgic. The projects which sought to bring Christian values to bear as the socio-economic system developed were passed by when the power was wielded.

Part of their failure can be attributed to the fact that they did not question the basic assumptions of the trend toward a more technological-industrialized agriculture. They often found themselves affirming rural values of "smallness," "community," "face-to-face," "democracy," "honesty," etc. while supporting an agricultural system which eliminated the possibility for many of those values. Some began the exploration into theological themes which might be supportive of a more sustainable vision: a holy earth, community, work and intellect, but did not see a unifying vision. Agriculture

along with industry was confined to "secular" critique. The job of the church was defined in terms of personal morals and community ideals.

Closely connected with this deficiency was the inability to question the very foundation of the food system itself. There was no philosophical framework on which to build an analysis of the value of agriculture not just to Americans, but to the entire globe--past, present and future. The romantic posture prevented a realistic description of agriculture's place in a society. The only way of relating to the creation was to ignore it, despise it or sentimentalize it.

The recent theological constructs of responsible stewardship, romantic idealism and deep ecology are to be commended for seeing the importance of providing a unifying vision. The suggestions I have presented from a Whiteheadian position can provide the framework for inclusion of many of their insights in a form which is not contradictory. As Whitehead himself believed, though, it is my hope that this is but one more step along the road to a biocentric theology.

Change does not occur overnight. These ministries are to be commended for beginning the conversation about rural renewal. It is our job in the present to take the next step which is the creation of a regenerative metaphysical theology. We must be disciplined to do the hard work of thinking cosmologically. People demand that their lives be coherent. They do not wish to be a "steward" on one day and a "strip-miner" on

the next. They desire care for the environment as well as human industry. They want their cake and eat it too. This is the possibility of a regenerative theology: one which values the fecundity and complexity of Nature--its intrinsic worth--yet describes a role for humans which brings dignity, adventure and beauty to the human being. Such a theology helps the humans to understand that much of their own purposes are fulfilled as they enhance the landscape, and contribute to the overall complexity and cooperation of other biological life. I believe that the cosmology presented in chapter 5 is a place to start. This metaphysic provides a realistic grounding for the many ideals expressed throughout the case study analysis.

Much is left to be worked out as to the practical ramifications of adopting such a rural metaphysic. Due to the already extended length of this project I shall identify some of the more obvious implications for such rural education centers as The Campbell Farm. Some of these suggestions might also be applicable for those who are working on farm crisis hotlines, the development of alternative agricultural methods, and as public policy advocates. They should also be helpful for pastors and teachers who are serving in rural areas.

Suggestions for Effective Rural Renewal

Rural culture has intrinsic values, spirit and complexity worthy of respect and deeper study. Yet it can not be segregated away from urban or ecological cultures. Any ministry seeking to address its problems and provide healing must view them in the many contexts in which it finds itself.

Like all other societies of life it has no subjective privacy. It derives its characteristics from its ecological and urban settings and issues back into their publicity.

If a ministry has education as its primary methodology then it should not only use it to "raise consciousness" of rural degradation but also to provide a new metaphysical structure within which renewal can take place. They must recognize the inadequacy of previous metaphysics to include rural and biological life in their scope of consideration. New metaphysical structures can be provided by ministers who themselves have taken the time to understand their own world-view, and learned from some of the new proposals of rural metaphysicians.

Rural culture always has and will continue to change. There is no going back to some idyllic age. Values, traditions, lessons learned and feeling-tones of yesteryear can be enjoyed but they must always be reintroduced into the increasing complexity of modern life to see if they can adapt and survive.

Process metaphysics can help the Christian church to articulate a rational and necessary theology of all creation. It can do this within the context of human civilization and the increasing recognition of the fragileness of life. Without such a metaphysic, rural people--like the land, animals and plants--will continue to be dominated by the insecure, privatized, urban consciousness. Rural ministries can provide this consciousness with a re-rooting into life in such a way as to respect the complexity of urban life.

Rural renewal efforts must not ignore the harsh reality that the urban civilizations "feed off" the land. Rural culture evolved as it is today because it is in the business of feeding, clothing, sheltering, and watering urban populations. However, this should not hinder efforts to change this process from a non-regenerative "mining" to what Whitehead calls "robbery." The former exterminates itself by killing off its ecosystem. The latter robs in order to give back more life in intensity of experience for the future. This robbery is then in actuality an act of mutual cooperation, not based on privacy but on publicity. It operates not by antagonism but by need. The mining systems we have created in our agriculture, forestry, mineral appropriation and water usage lack the kind of coordination which can surmount the laws of entropy and thus result in more life. For example, the fact that it takes between 2 to 30 calories of input energy in American agriculture to get one calorie of food on the table is representative of a mining mentality. The Whiteheadian can reply that such a system is not only non-sustainable and inefficient but also swimming upstream against the lure of God. As audacious as it might seem, such mining is actually working against the real flow of life; such actions exact their toll in anxiety over future loss, greedy hoarding and defensive measures. The person, on the other hand, who seeks to rob life in such a way as to enhance the future fecundity of all life within reach is entering upon the path of least resistance. This is the path which leads to intensification of joy; the joys of meaningful labor, self-empowerment, interest in the diversity and com-

plexity of life, and leisurely cooperation.

Along this same line, it is time that rural people stopped playing the victim of urban culture and began to devise ways of their own to cooperatively rob it. Using their imagination and intelligence, rural peoples can analyse the needs of the urbanite and, looking at their own powers, seek to provide for them--at a price.

A process metaphysic can also provide the foundation for cooperative development among rural peoples. One of the most common complaints of rural ministries, past and present, is the belief that farmers do not want to work together. Perhaps part of this reluctance can be attributed to the fact that so much of agriculture, as it is practiced today, is built upon a gospel of force and competition rather than cooperation. Farmers have typically scoffed at Christian ideals of cooperation, sharing, and love when it comes to the operations of their farms or rural economies. Such ideals need to be taken out of the future, "Wouldn't it be nice if....?" and shown to be part of reality, "This is the way it is...." The meek will truly inherit the earth:

In the history of the world, the prize has not gone to those species which specialized in methods of violence, or even in defensive armour. In fact, nature began with producing animals encased in hard shells for defense against the ills of life. It also experimented in size. But smaller animals, without external armour, warm-blooded, sensitive, and alert, have cleared these monsters off the face of the earth. Also, the lions and tigers are not the successful species. There is something in the ready use of force which defeats its own object. Its main defect is that it bars cooperation. Every organism

requires an environment of friends, partly to shield it from violent changes, and partly to supply it with its wants. The Gospel of Force is incompatible with a social life. ¹

From this we may draw the conclusion that the ideal form of economic activity--the way in which humans obtain their basic necessities from the creation--is the model of cooperation. We must begin to recognize other humans, creatures and plants as our "society of friends," not our competitive enemies. It must be assumed as humans modify each habitat that what is there has been put there as a friend not as an enemy--even if there appears to be no obvious economic value.

Complexity rather than simplicity is the norm. We must learn to distrust the simple solution. ² So often these end up devaluing life, resulting in less zest and intensity. It is more difficult to learn to cooperate with different individuals and species for our physical and emotional needs but it is more sustainable and definitely more interesting.

Because reality is marked by process in relationship we can understand the solidarity of the world. Being constituted

¹ Whitehead, Adventures, 206.

² This simplicity is to be contrasted negatively with complexity. Simplicity, on the other hand, when it is contrasted with complicated is much more affirmative. Whitehead believes that simplicity is positive when directed backward at the past. It is the role of the Category of Transmutation to simplify, through negative prehensions, the past. "The irrelevant multiplicity of detail is eliminated, and emphasis is laid on the elements of systematic order in the actual world." (Whitehead, Process, 254) Consequently, intellectual feelings are made possible, allowing intensity of feeling for a few things lifted out of the welter of the past.

by its becoming and perishing forces us to look at both the whole and the parts of any system. As a result there must be much more study of the larger systems which go to make up our lives.

Because science up to now has been strongly reductionist, we know more about the systems that make up our bodies and our cells than we do about those that transcend our individual lives--the evolutionary, ecologic, and social "wholes" of which we are "parts."³

The observers who study these systems would be as equally admired as the doctors who work on our individual body systems, if not more so because of the increased complexity. Especially prestigious would be those who seek to understand the "life-support system" of our planet, its land, air and water resources--all those incredibly complex functions which have made it possible for biological life to exist for millenia.

Peace and discontent would be redefined in such a society. The former would not be some static bliss where there were no longer any desires but the "intuition of permanence" in life. It is not Anaesthesia but "self-control at its widest--at the width where the 'self' has been lost, and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than personality."⁴

So, we would seek a security not of this world, of this present moment. We would learn to have security and peace in the small additions we can each make to the permanence of the

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Scherer, 16.

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Whitehead, Adventures, 285.

life process. Every tree we plant, every action we take which may not come to fruition for fifty years, would provide that sense of purpose and meaningfulness that we have nudged along God's desires. Discontent, on the other hand, is not a disruptive or demonic influence.⁵ Rather it would be defined as the "living agent persuading the world to aim at fineness beyond the faded level of surrounding fact."⁶ It means not being content with a system simply because it "works" for me but seeking harmony for all.

Rural theologians would bring true hope to people who sense deep pits of despair, true light to people looking into a dark, vast void, and true adventure to those who are bored seeking their own security. The senseless clashings are intuited. What must be reflected upon and explained is this growing sensitivity to God, cooperation and sentience over the millenia. The wonder and awe, feeling of love and warmth, for life and the Supreme Live-er: such embers must receive air from the theological bellows. Human thirst for rational drink

5

One could construe Whitehead's Divine discontent as simply another form of Western society's fascination with change if it were not for this combination of values as the teleology with the power toward novelty. It is not the kind of discontent described in the following passage by a friend of the Indian: "We need to awaken in him wants. In his dull savagery he must be touched by the wings of the divine angel of discontent....Discontent with the tepee and the starving rations of the Indian camp in winter is needed to get the Indian out of the blanket and into trousers--and trousers with a pocket in them, and with a pocket that aches to filled with dollars." (Turner, 287.)

6

Whitehead, Adventures, 286.

to understand civilization and the tenderness of life must be quenched.

Finally, the food production of rural areas should model this new metaphysics, perhaps in the following ways:

1. Straight rows, monocrops, elimination of pests, etc. would be distrusted for their tendency to simplify.
2. Diversity of crops and animals would be sought for the intensity of experience and the requirement of cooperation among them and the necessity of human community.
3. Strained labor would be suspect as continuing the Gospel of Force and ways would be sought to lure and woo the food.
4. Certain sections of the farm would be designated the "theater" where adventurous ideas could be played out regardless of survival.
5. The entire design of the farm would be seen as an Art--one that preserves the experience of previous creatures and plants as the source of Harmony. As Whitehead describes it, "Great art is the arrangement of the environment so as to provide for the soul vivid, but transient values. Human beings require something which absorbs them for a time, something out of the routine that they can stare at."⁷
6. Such a farm could exist in a suburban backyard, inner-city lot or greenhouse, as well as the rural fields.
7. The adventure of the hunt and the gather (i.e. Easter eggs) would be maximized in the harvesting procedures. Perhaps urbanites would pay to experience this uncertainty.
8. The problem would be seen as not the production of great crops but the production of great soils --the great soil will put up the great crop for the occasions.

7

Whitehead, Science, 202.

These suggestions are indeed sketchy, but they perhaps need to be. There are few dogmatics in the Whiteheadian approach to reality. All these would have to be tested and experimented with in different contexts. Much would be lost in the transition from industrial agriculture and perhaps even from field cultivation. Yet, there is much to gain in developing a more sustainable rural culture, based on solid rationale.

As our faith and food systems more closely inform one another, Christians will begin to gain a new appreciation and concern for God's creation all around them. Its manifold forms from bugs and viruses, to mountains and sunsets will be sources for awe and curiosity rather than fear and isolation. Rural peoples and lands, and urban folk and buildings will not be despised or sentimentalized but respected and valued for their place in the ecological web of life. Caring Christians will not be afraid to voice their disapproval of systems which do not add to the complexity and cooperation of all God's creatures. They will diligently explore and redesign such systems as ways to love their neighbors. In so doing, rural renewal will be sustained by the very love and power of God which has created, coaxed, and cooperated with this gift of life.

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